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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to help public school leaders sort through the arguments that voucher proponents advance, examining who supports vouchers, what kinds of voucher proposals are surfacing, and what arguments proponents typically offer in their campaigns. The text gives public-school advocates the tools to recognize and refute the fallacies that voucher advocates advance. It provides the background to vouchers, describing why vouchers receive so much attention in urban areas and the broader political underpinnings of the pro-voucher movement. Reasons to oppose vouchers, including the claims that they undermine the unique value of public education, waste taxpayers' dollars, and promote a divided America are likewise detailed. Suggestions for responding to pro-voucher arguments include contesting the assertion that taxpayers and public education will save money with vouchers. Tips for building a campaign against vouchers are provided, along with an overview of research on voucher programs, the success of public-school-choice programs, and the case against federal vouchers. Ten appendices offer an overview of current voucher projects, a list of national organizations opposing vouchers, a profile of private education, and other information. (RJM)

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A Tool Kit for School Board Members

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Why Vouchers Won't Work
A Tool Kit for School Board Members

By Michael A. Resnick

Associate Executive Director

National School Boards Association

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INTRODUCTION

The push to use vouchers to channel public funds into private schools began more than 40 years ago with the free-market theories of economist Milton Friedman. Since then, voucher advocates have refined their arguments to attract maximum support from an array of special interest groups Some groups want to use public funds to support private schools that reflect their own religious, social, or moral beliefs. Others want to reduce taxes, decrease tuition costs at private schools, and minimize government involvement in education. Private school operators and entrepreneurs also see an opportunity to benefit from the reallocation of billions of dollars of public funds to their privately controlled and substantially unregulated institutions.

To achieve their goals, voucher proponents have appealed to the broader public by promoting voter dissatisfaction with public education. Their well-known negative campaign has exaggerated the social problems some public schools might face—safety, discipline, and drugs, for example--as well as areas of academic performance that need to be strengthened. Meanwhile, voucher proponents frequently have opposed constructive solutions to improve U.S. schools, including the investment of adequate resources.

This two-pronged campaign—for vouchers and against public schools—can leave public school advocates feeling swamped by what seems to be an endless parade of strident assertions.

To help public school leaders sort through the arguments that voucher proponents advance, this publication takes a close look at the voucher movement: who supports vouchers, what kinds of voucher proposals are surfacing, and what arguments proponents typically offer in their campaign to channel public funds to private schools. Many of these arguments rely on emotional appeals, theories that are not supported by fact, and a barrage of studies based on selective or inaccurate data. This paper will give public school advocates the tools to recognize and refute the fallacies that voucher advocates advance.

Finally, this publication shows local education leaders how they can translate intellectual arguments into political action by developing a unified message, targeting key audiences, and building coalitions. A collection of op-ed articles, radio advertisements, and other materials used in actual grassroots campaigns to defeat vouchers also appears in the extensive appendices to this publication.

The Tool Kit was written by Michael A. Resnick, Associate Executive Director, NSBA Office of Advocacy.

Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL KIT

The information and techniques provided in this volume are drawn substantially from the experience of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) as well as from the work of scholars, journalists, and leaders of state school boards associations who have been involved in the national policy debate or in anti-voucher campaigns in their own states.

Rather than a monograph, this publication is a tool kit that includes the major arguments and campaign strategies you are likely to encounter if vouchers are proposed in your state. It is intended to assist local school boards and state school boards associations to build their campaigns, develop training programs, and initiate effective strategies to defeat vouchers.

As you read through these materials, though, remember that you will need to adapt these ideas to your own locale. Overall, you will want to select only the best debating points and the most focused message. You also will want to be consistent and to identify the best forums to use to make your case. The media, community groups, and the state legislature will all be important.

To streamline your efforts to build a winning campaign, summaries and checklists appear at the end of each section. In addition, "Special Issues," beginning on page 31, presents more extensive treatment of several key points, and the appendices provide additional background data on vouchers as well as sample materials used in actual campaigns.

A successful campaign to defeat vouchers will require early planning and action at the first signs that a ballot initiative or a piece of legislation is being proposed. However, the best defense comes from a public that is well informed and involved in its public schools. Therefore, we have included ideas for increasing public involvement and understanding, with the view that an informed public will reduce the prospects that the unfair bashing of public schools, which is essential to attract support for vouchers, will be taken seriously in your community.

Overall, this publication seeks to capture the tenor of the ongoing debate over vouchers. For periodic updates, consult NSBA's site on the World Wide Web (http://www.nsba.org). To make our national effort to fight vouchers as effective as possible, we also would appreciate hearing about your ideas and experiences so that we can share them with other public school advocates who face voucher proposals in their own states. Our e-mail address is *Advocacy@nsba.org*.

VOUCHERS: A POLICY BACKGROUND

This section provides background information to help you put the arguments for and against vouchers in context. Specifically, this section broadly addresses five major questions:

1. What are vouchers?
2. Who supports vouchers, and what are they saying?
3. Why are vouchers receiving so much attention in urban areas?
4. What does the research say about the voucher debate?
5. What are the broader political underpinnings of the pro-voucher movement?

1. What Are Vouchers?

This question immediately sparks political debate. Proponents speak of vouchers as empowering parents to choose which school their children attend and forcing public schools to excel through competition. Opponents counter that vouchers undermine public education and democracy, promote elitism, and unwisely use public funds to support religious instruction. Before turning to the political debate, it is useful to know what vouchers are and how they work.

Defining vouchers. Generally speaking, vouchers must be created through an act of a state legislature or by voter approval through a state ballot initiative. They would enable parents to have all or some of the money that would have been available to educate their child in public school applied to the cost of enrolling that child in a private school. However, vouchers do not actually consist of a cash payment to parents. Rather, the state (or the school district where the student would have been enrolled) would transfer the appropriate level of funding to the private school.

Who is eligible to receive a voucher? Eligibility is tied to two factors: (1) the students who qualify to ***use*** the vouchers and (2) the schools that qualify to ***receive*** the money.

Student eligibility has taken two forms. Voucher proposals in California, Colorado, and Pennsylvania offered universal parent eligibility—that is, all students were eligible for vouchers. (These proposals were defeated.) By contrast, voucher legislation in Ohio and Wisconsin targeted eligibility to low-income families in Cleveland and Milwaukee, respectively. (These proposals were passed and are described in Appendix A.)

School eligibility also has varied. Milwaukee's voucher program originally was restricted to children who enrolled in nonsectarian private schools. (A lower state court blocked subsequent legislation to extend Milwaukee's voucher program to religious schools.) Provisions in Cleveland's program, which also allowed vouchers for sectarian schools, were struck down by the Ohio Court of Appeals as violating federal and state constitutional prohibitions regarding the establishment of religion. The voucher program proposed in California in 1993 would have been open to any private school that enrolled at least 25 students, while the Colorado plan, which voters rejected in 1992, would have included home schools, as well as private schools.

How does the funding work? Typically, the amount of the voucher is based on a flat sum that represents either some portion of state or local funding, or the amount of state aid that would have been paid for the child to attend public school in his or her school district.

The actual cost to the school district can vary, though, and in some proposals, those costs could exceed the amount of the voucher. For example, according to an analysis by School Services Incorporated of California, for each child transferring to private schools, the defeated voucher initiative in California would have cost school districts several times the $2,600 voucher. Specifically, for each voucher, the affected school district would have lost an amount of state aid tied to three factors: (1) dropping the child from the count of students when calculating the school district's share of state aid ($5,200), (2) then subtracting the amount of the voucher from the amount of aid that would go to the school system ($2,600 per voucher student), and (3) returning to the state the remaining portion of average state aid per voucher student as the "savings" for not having to educate the child (another $2,600). In effect, California school districts would have lost twice their total state aid, or four times the $2,600 voucher, for every child who transferred. While the school district could experience some real savings from not serving a voucher student, the net cost would still far exceed the $2,600 voucher.

Vouchers compared to tuition tax credits. Though vouchers are frequently compared to tuition tax credit and tax deduction plans, they are different in several respects. Tax credit and deduction plans do not transfer funds from the state to a private institution. In effect, parents receive a discount from their tax obligations for tuition paid in a prior year rather than a grant or subsidy from a public agency that is remitted to a private school.

This distinction could have legal significance. In 1983, for example, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Minnesota's tax deduction plan, ruling that the passive "rebate" mechanism associated with it adequately ensured that religion is not the direct beneficiary of public support. Vouchers, which involve an active transfer of funds from a public agency to a private institution, could cross that legal line. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, has not yet made such a determination.

In the 1997 case of *Agostini v. Felton*, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed its earlier decisions prohibiting public school teachers from providing compensatory services in religious schools. In so doing, without mentioning vouchers, it signaled that it might rule that vouchers to religious schools are unconstitutional. Specifically, the Court acknowledged the distinction between funding public services that benefit all students (including those enrolled in private schools) and directly funding religious institutions.

So why aren't voucher advocates pursuing tax credits and deductions?

For one thing, private schools prefer vouchers because the schools receive the funds directly. Further, since vouchers are not derived from parents' income, they could allow private schools to raise tuition more easily than tax deductions or credits could. (Additionally, with a tax deduction plan, parents would have to pay tuition out of their own pockets first; with a voucher, they wouldn't.)

Politically, vouchers are also more attractive than tax plans because low-income parents cannot afford the upfront tuition costs needed to participate in a rebate program. Moreover, unless tax credits include negative or refundable income payments from the state (e.g., Minnesota), they are of no benefit to low-income people who pay little or no taxes. Likewise, tax deductions work to the disproportionate advantage of people in higher tax brackets and to the disadvantage of those who cannot benefit from a full tax deduction. Finally, tax plans operate as open-ended draws against a state's general revenues, whereas vouchers are paid for as deductions from a set level of state aid or local funding for education.

Vouchers compared to charter schools and choice programs. More than half the states have passed laws allowing parents and teachers to establish charter schools at public expense. Charter schools operate relatively independently of the public school system, receive public funds on a per-pupil basis (e.g., reallocated from the school or system that the child would have attended), and involve student choice. At first glance, vouchers appear to resemble charter schools and thereby may add to state pressures to adopt them. However, there are several key distinctions. For example, most charters are granted by a public agency (such as a local school board). And charter schools are subject to criteria, expectations, operating conditions, and monitoring that are not required of private schools. Further, most charters are staffed by public employees, cannot charge tuition, and are subject to the same admissions requirements as public schools.

However, there are some areas where the distinction between charters and vouchers do become blurred. Several states, most notably Arizona, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, allow private schools to become charter schools. Depending on how it is implemented, a private school charter can operate as a "back-door" voucher. Additionally, a distinction should be made between public charter schools that are created by local school boards and those created by other entities, such as the state or a public university. Although public in character, these charter schools, like private school vouchers, redirect local school district finances without any legal, fiscal, or performance accountability to the voters in the community.

Finally, vouchers should not be confused with public school choice programs. Choice programs can include public charter schools as well as other public schools within the district and in other school districts. (Magnet schools are a case in point.) In choice programs, too, students remain within the public school system—as do the funds that support them. Public school choice programs exist throughout the United States. Among the most visible examples are the schools of choice in Community School District 4 in East Harlem, New York; the controlled choice program in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Minnesota's interdistrict choice programs; and magnet schools in Montgomery County, Maryland.

2. Who Supports Vouchers and What are They Saying?

An array of groups supports vouchers, each with its own special interest in promoting public funding for private education.

Voucher advocates include religious organizations, private school operators, various ideological groups (such as those seeking smaller government), some business groups, and groups seeking to reduce their taxes. (A list of national organizations and think tanks supporting vouchers appears in Appendix B; a list of those opposing vouchers appears in Appendix C.) Certainly, voucher proponents also include individual parents who, for a variety of educational, social, or religious reasons, want taxpayer-supported alternatives to neighborhood public schools.

While these groups can agree that they support vouchers, they probably could not reach a consensus on a specific set of substantive strategies to guide the future of American education. For example, religious groups, advocates from the business community, and libertarians probably would not agree on how to develop academic standards or curriculum content and are even less likely to agree on the details. Likewise, these groups might attack the so-called secular values taught in public schools, but probably could not agree on the specific values schools should teach. To minimize such differences, pro-voucher campaigns typically operate on the surface, by attacking public education and insisting as an "article of faith" that vouchers will improve education—even though the groups behind such campaigns cannot articulate a common vision or purpose for what that education would be.

Essentially, proponents of vouchers give two reasons for their stand:

1. They say that most public schools are failing, and

2. They say that vouchers will help the children who use them and provide public schools with the incentive to improve.

America's public schools are not failing. Despite the claims of voucher advocates, student achievement isn't foundering, costs aren't skyrocketing, dropout rates aren't rising, and private schools aren't posting superior results. (Appendix D refutes some of the most common myths about public education.) Surely, some public schools are struggling. But the answer lies in implementing strategies that will improve these schools directly and supporting the special needs of the children who attend them. Indirect strategies like vouchers benefit a few at the expense of the majority.

In addition to promoting their myths about the state of public education, voucher proponents also make emotionally powerful—but faulty—arguments about choice, competition, the double taxation of private school parents, and equity for the poor. As appealing as these arguments may be, they are hollow political slogans that divert attention from the real needs of America's schools and the negative impact that vouchers will have.

All these issues will be addressed in detail in other parts of this tool kit.

3. Why Are Vouchers Receiving So Much Attention in Urban Areas?

Although some polls show increasing voter support for vouchers, proponents have not succeeded in passing legislation or ballot initiatives to create universal statewide programs. (See Appendix E for a history of state action on vouchers and tuition tax credits.) The only voucher programs that have been enacted so far are targeted to two urban centers. Given this legislative track record, voucher proponents are likely to target other cities as well.

The reasons for such attention are simple. Many large cities are struggling to find ways to improve the academic performance of large numbers of children whose test scores are substantially below the rest of the state. These children come to school with challenges not commonly seen in middle-class suburban schools. By targeting low-income parents, voucher proponents can capture the appealing political high ground by arguing on behalf of equity while not directly threatening the stability of public schools elsewhere in the state.

But the push for urban vouchers is misguided in two ways. First, such vouchers won't work because they do not directly improve the schools where a majority of the students will continue to be enrolled. Indeed, such voucher programs become an excuse for state legislators and others to do nothing while the public schools lose much-needed resources. Substantive ideas to improve the performance of low-achieving students in urban schools exist (early education, increased parental participation, smaller classes, professional development, special reading programs, and coordinated social services, for example). What is lacking is the political will to provide the financial resources to implement the range of programs needed.

Second, urban vouchers will redirect vital resources and community commitment into private schools that will then attract and retain students who may be poor but whose needs are not as challenging or costly as the needs of those remaining in the depleted public schools.

Meanwhile, those who are promoting vouchers for inner-city students are not limiting their

mission to funding a small number of private schools or limited numbers of low-income families. Rather, many supporters are simply using urban areas as a toehold to pursue a broader voucher program that, in the long run, will divert even more resources statewide and further hurt urban education.

4. What Does the Research Say About the Voucher Debate?

Voucher proponents all too often use selective, if not inaccurate, data to describe public education and then draw unfavorable comparisons to the private schools. They also claim that evidence exists to demonstrate the educational efficacy of vouchers.

For example, voucher advocates frequently connect falling or flat SAT scores and rising costs in public education as evidence of failure. Apart from the fact that SAT scores are now rising (and are not a valid measure of achievement), public school critics overlook the much more diverse student population that now takes the exam, including a much greater number of students who are in the lower academic ranks of their high school class.

Voucher advocates argue that public school children do not perform as well on international tests. However, although the United States is not No. 1, the differences in point scores from one country to another are often insignificant. Further, international comparisons are difficult because in many nations, subject matter is taught at different grade levels and not all students take exams.

Most important, in 1997 the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) earned more acceptance as a measure of international achievement than previous studies. The TIMSS findings showed that America's fourth-grade students (nearly 90 percent of whom attend public schools) were above average in math and outperformed virtually every other nation in science. Only Korean students performed at statistically higher levels in science than their American counterparts.

Likewise, with respect to public school expenditures, the critics also ignore the fact that the increase in real costs is tied in large part to such factors as increased services for high-cost special-needs children (who do not attend private schools in representative numbers) and the superior qualifications of public school teachers (compared to public school teachers in previous years and to private school teachers today).

Further, contrary to the critics' charges that America spends an exorbitant amount on education compared to other nations, United States schools are only average in their expenditures. According to a study conducted by the Economic Policy Institute, once key items, like the high cost of American postsecondary education, are factored out, the United States ranked ninth among sixteen industrialized countries in 1988 in expenditures.

These and other fallacies in the data used by voucher proponents are examined in detail by David Berliner and Bruce Biddle in *The Manufactured Crisis* as well as the NSBA publications listed at the end of this volume. (See also Appendix D.)

Not only does research exist that accurately describes the real condition of American education, it also validates what most Americans know about their own neighborhood public schools, which frequently are the only schools they see. Specifically, according to the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools (and other reliable public opinion surveys), the American people rate their own neighborhood schools as very good or good. Their concern is over what they have been led to believe about those schools they don't

see—those located in other communities, which the residents of those communities also rate as very good or good.

Voucher proponents also argue that private schools are better than public schools. But while the research shows differences in raw test scores between public and private schools, the better showing on the part of private schools primarily results from higher family incomes, better-educated parents, parents who are more involved in their children's education, and selective admissions policies. After accounting for these factors, it is clear that private schools do not produce better students than public schools do. (For a discussion of the characteristics of private schools, see Appendix F.)

In a chapter of *Holding Schools Accountable*, researcher John F. Witte observed: "Consistently, students attending private school are more likely to be white, come from higher-income homes and have parents with higher levels of education." His conclusion is that after controlling for family characteristics, if there is any achievement advantage to private schools, "the gains are small enough to have little policy advantage."

Other separate research findings cited by Witte confirm his findings. For example, Daniel Goldhaber's work concluded that "[i]n no case is there a positive statistical sector effect favoring private schools. Hence, the argument that the private sector out performs the public appears weak." Likewise, researcher Adam Gamoran concluded that, after controlling for student differences, "the results show no advantage of secular private schools, and a Catholic-school advantage only in math at best." He predicts that by maintaining the focus on academics and course-taking in math "this difference too would disappear."

Finally, proponents point to the Milwaukee and Cleveland voucher programs, privately funded vouchers in other locations, and an array of successful public school choice programs to justify vouchers. But the research shows that despite all the energy and high-profile focus, there is no proof that existing voucher programs make a meaningful difference. (See page 31 for more on the Milwaukee plan.) In his book *Rethinking School Choice*, Jeffrey R. Henig extensively reviews the lack of controls in comparing traditional public schools with both choice programs and private schools. He cautions against drawing conclusions from what superficial "evidence" may show, as compared to the real causal connection that distinguishes schools from one another.

While successful public school choice programs do exist, they are the successes of the public schools. If anything, they justify continued investment to support more innovation in public schools, not strategies such as vouchers that would undermine those efforts.

5. What Are the Broader Political Underpinnings of the Pro-Voucher Movement?

As a stand-alone issue, education vouchers present legislators and voters with an enormous decision regarding the philosophy and delivery of education in America. The issue is so large that the debate frequently involves political, not educational issues, and the process for reaching decisions involves a full-fledged political campaign.

Given the enormity of the voucher issue, it is easy to lose sight of the broader political and strategic context in which it operates.

For some proponents, vouchers are just one of a number of mechanisms to reshape American education to meet their social agenda. Many state legislators, think tanks, and other voucher advocates also want to (1) expand religious activities in public schools; (2) expand the power of

individual parents to legally overturn majority-supported aspects of the common classroom curricula and values taught in public schools; (3) abolish the U.S. Department of Education; (4) abolish federal grant-in-aid programs or transform them into vouchers; (5) authorize privately operated charter schools to be financed at public expense; and (6) promote home-schooling.

Frequently, advocates of these positions also oppose additional state funding for public education and want to limit the capacity of local school systems to raise their own revenues and spending. As a result, public school advocates frequently find themselves fighting a multifaceted battle. At times they are forced to consider compromises, such as supporting an objectionable charter school proposal, to deflate the political momentum for vouchers.

Beyond its relationship to other education strategies, the voucher issue has an even broader political context. Its supporters include legislators who normally aren't associated with education issues, as well as various business and other interests who are seeking to reduce the presence of government in other areas, including the deregulation of industry standards, or to make it possible for the private sector to provide more public services.

To win voter support around the broader principles of deregulation and privatization, as well as to elect candidates who support a more limited government, these proponents use vouchers as an attractive political "stalking horse." That is, a campaign built around the criticism of "government schools" and in support of "free-market competition among schools" and "consumer choice" may resonate better with some segments of the general public than does a campaign to deregulate specific industries. Hence, if the public is won over in its thinking about education and elects candidates who are more likely to "fix" education through approaches like vouchers, the climate is likely to improve for advocates of deregulation and privatization in other areas.

Clearly, there can be a variety of reasons some voucher advocates are attracted to their cause, and the strength of their commitment might be substantially broader than education.

SUMMARY

VOUCHERS: A POLICY BACKGROUND

This section provided general background on vouchers. It also:

I. Explained what vouchers are and how they differ from other strategies offered to improve schools or to promote public funding for private education.

II. Identified who supports vouchers and why.

III. Explained why vouchers are being proposed in urban areas.

IV. Showed that the research does not support vouchers.

V. Identified the broader political motives for supporting vouchers.

REASONS TO OPPOSE VOUCHERS

Public school leaders know the vital role public education plays in our democracy, and they know the damage that vouchers are likely to do. Bringing these points home to legislators, business leaders, parents, and other community members is crucial to your success in defeating vouchers. This chapter outlines the reasons to oppose vouchers.

Vouchers Undermine the Unique Value of Public Education

The debate on vouchers raises many issues involving public policy and educational strategy—issues such as competition, choice, and student achievement. While these issues have to be addressed, the unique and vital role that public education has played—and must continue to play—in the success of our nation must be brought to the heart of the debate. Voters and state legislators must be reminded of the importance of that role and of what is at stake if vouchers undermine public education.

Simply stated, the success of our nation, as an economy, as a democracy, and as a culture, rests solidly on a system of public schools that have been reliably and universally available to all—regardless of family background or income. The American dream is about individual opportunity, and the public schools have been a realistic beacon of hope to anyone wanting more for themselves and their children.

Public education is about individual opportunity. The primary purpose of public education is to guarantee that every child has access to a free education at a school in his or her community. To ensure this happens, public schools are funded by tax dollars, and students cannot be denied admission on the basis of academic performance, ability to pay, race, religion, gender, disability, knowledge of English, or other special need. In addition, state laws and court enforcement require adequacy and equity in educational opportunity in public education. For example, the level of funding among public schools must conform to equalization standards, teachers must be certified, all students must be accepted, and tuition cannot be charged. Private schools aren't subject to the same requirements.

Public education is about promoting a democracy. On a broader scale, public education defines and advances a nation committed to the basic principles of equity, fairness, and opportunity for all. Public education ensures that today's school children will be prepared for the workplace and that the common values and principles of citizenship needed to unify the nation will be taught to all.

In advancing these goals, public schools clearly belong to the people; indeed, the rights of parents and the interest of the public at large to guide the public schools are guaranteed through the ballot box, community involvement in public schools, representative school boards, and public accountability.

In the last century, 90 percent of Americans have been educated in public schools. The fact that the United States has been the economic and democratic wonder of the world is in itself strong testimony on behalf of our public schools.

Why Vouchers Won't Work

As a strategy to improve American education, vouchers will fail. This section outlines four basic defects in the voucher concept:

1. Vouchers Weaken Public Education
2. Vouchers Undermine Opportunity for All
3. Vouchers Waste Taxpayer Dollars
4. Vouchers Promote a Divided America

Vouchers Weaken Public Education

Vouchers will weaken, not improve, public education. Proponents argue that by fostering competition, vouchers will operate as a benign force to improve public education. In actuality, the reverse will be true: Vouchers will siphon off much-needed financial resources as well as the best students and the most engaged parents. As such, vouchers will not improve public education but rather will undermine the public schools' capacity to compete and improve.

Vouchers encourage policymakers and others to give up on public education. Vouchers send a powerful message to policymakers and the public to abandon their public schools. After all, why should legislators and community leaders even think about improving a struggling school—let alone provide adequate resources for it—if they believe that offering vouchers (for those who can gain admission to private schools) absolves them of any further responsibility?

For governors, state legislators, and other elected leaders, vouchers are an excuse to become lazy about public education and to escape accountability for their contribution to improve it. In effect, vouchers are a self-fulfilling strategy of neglect and failed commitment to our public schools and the children they educate.

Vouchers will erode public support for public education. Unlike funding for vouchers, ongoing taxpayer support is needed to pass the tax levies, school budgets, and bond issues that fund public education. Yet at least 70 percent of the households in most communities today do not have school-age children. Consequently, passing funding measures frequently requires hard campaigning by a small core of activist parents. Splintering active parents away from the public schools will not only weaken these efforts but also will undermine other activities, e.g., in-school and community involvement, that are needed to sustain a quality school program.

Since vouchers would provide private school students with a flat sum "off the top" of public school funding, parents who are encouraged by vouchers to transfer children into private schools lose incentive to support their public schools (or to even vote in school budget or bond elections.)

Worse yet, the message to the general public will be, "Why support local tax increases when parents can just send their child to private school and get a state voucher (which ultimately comes at the expense of the local school system)?"

Vouchers Undermine Opportunity for All

Vouchers weaken the commitment to universal educational opportunity. In the United States, every child is guaranteed access to a neighborhood public school, regardless of academic ability, family background, or disciplinary record. Vouchers change the focus from improving educational opportunity of all children in public schools to one of subsidizing more opportunity for the most acceptable among them in private schools.

Vouchers transform the context of public education from the right to attend an actual neighborhood school to an intangible publicly funded "chit." But a chit does not guarantee that a student will be accepted (or retained) at a particular private school—or by any private school. Nor does it guarantee that even with a voucher, the student can afford to attend a private school. Indeed, as vouchers weaken public schooling, the student who isn't accepted at a private school will have a less viable neighborhood school to attend and, under the free-market philosophy that drives vouchers, will have no societal guarantee that a place called public school will even be available.

Vouchers are not about universal parent choice. Geography and family finances will limit most low-income students to a very narrow range of private schools. Even then, the private school, not the parent, will determine which child is admitted and retained. Therefore, vouchers will not broaden the choices available to children from low-income families or those who do not meet the profile of private schools. Rather, vouchers will provide more choices to private institutions to determine which children to accept or reject.

Vouchers will reduce equity in educational opportunity. Voucher advocates talk about giving low-income families the same opportunity to enroll their children in private schools as wealthier families. Vouchers will not produce that result. Even with vouchers, low-income families will still be financially, socially, and geographically shut out of all but the cheapest neighborhood private schools. Even if elite schools admit students without regard to income, race, or handicap, these schools still could (and therefore would) screen students through academic standards, admissions tests, disciplinary policies, requirements for parent involvement, and other criteria.

Certainly not all public schools are equal in performance, nor are they equal in the level of resources available to them. Yet the public schools are guided by rules of admission, and the courts and legislatures have substantially narrowed disparities in public school funding. In the absence of similar rules for private schools, vouchers are likely to broaden the gap of resources available to students along economic lines. Indeed, vouchers will enable the most elite private schools to raise tuition to provide even more services (at public expense) for the wealthy, while the same amount of money will produce marginal schools for the poor.

Vouchers Waste Taxpayers' Dollars

Vouchers will force taxpayers to support two education systems. Proponents argue that vouchers will save taxpayer dollars while generating pressure on low-performing public schools to improve. In reality, though, vouchers will generate needless financial waste.

With 4.8 million children currently enrolled in private schools (1993-1994), a universal voucher of $3,000 per child would immediately reallocate over $14 billion from public to private schools. Such a reduction in public school funds will hardly improve the education of children enrolled in public schools. In fact, such a shortfall is likely to force state legislatures and school boards to raise taxes to make up for at least some of the lost revenue. In effect, taxpayers will be asked to support two education systems instead of one.

Vouchers will create a new entitlement program that ultimately benefits the rich. As time goes on, more families—and more private schools—are likely to become dependent upon vouchers and lobby to expand the number and range of people eligible for them. A universal voucher that does not distinguish between rich and poor would be a windfall to the wealthiest of families—although they may not need public support to subsidize tuition at elite private schools.

Given a finite amount of public money, the pressure to fund this growing entitlement most likely will come at the expense of general funds for public schools.

In addition, according to U.S. Department of Education statistics, in 1991, four out of every five students in private schools came from families whose annual incomes exceeded $50,000. In the public schools, only about one out of five students come from families at that income level. Clearly, high-income families will become the immediate beneficiaries of vouchers. Middle- and low-income taxpayers shouldn't be expected to subsidize a program that so disproportionately benefits the wealthy.

Vouchers Promote a Divided America

Vouchers will lead to the balkanization of American education and culture. In addition to teaching academic core subjects, the nation's public schools are the primary institutions for teaching common values, the American heritage, and national pride. By encouraging more students to enroll in a diffuse collection of private schools, the transcending public interest in promoting an American culture and identity will be ignored or diminished. Indeed, vouchers will foster the creation of publicly subsidized "niche" schools defined by ethnicity, language, or religion. The broader values and goals that we share as a society and that unify our nation will be pushed to the side.

Vouchers will resegregate American education. This nation has striven to promote equal opportunity and universal cross-racial understanding among its young. In many communities, universal vouchers will become a publicly funded ticket to end those gains to the detriment of many students and the nation as a whole. While some private schools may have open admissions policies, unless they are required to maintain racial balance, their tuition, location, school culture, and mission can easily attract students along racial lines as well as undo public school desegregation plans.

Vouchers would tear down the wall that separates church and state. In 1993-1994, about 85 percent of the nation's 4.8 million private school students were enrolled in church-affiliated schools. Hence, the relationship between vouchers and public sponsorship of religion is a real issue.

Under current U.S. Supreme Court rulings, the use of vouchers to transfer public funds to religious schools violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. (For a discussion of the constitutional issues involving vouchers, see Appendix G.)

Even if vouchers weren't illegal, using funds derived from all taxpayers to promote specific and conflicting religious beliefs in a society as diverse as ours is also bad public policy. Specifically, channeling public tax dollars to religious schools is divisive and threatens to erode support from taxpayers who might disagree with the religious tenets and practices their tax dollars might be redirected to support.

Public opinion polls consistently show that the American people don't want their tax dollars spent on religious education. However, vouchers promote that result by subsidizing church-operated schools while undermining public schools.

Other Reasons Vouchers Won't Work

Vouchers are a marginal strategy. Public schools currently enroll 46 million children. Even if private schools had the capacity to accommodate twice as many students as they currently enroll, some 40 million children still would be attending public schools. Numbers like these are telling: If the goal is to improve public education, the best strategy would be to focus on improving the schools where the vast majority of children will remain enrolled—not on indirect efforts that will only draw resources away from these youngsters.

Vouchers will invite the regulation of private education. Private education can play a beneficial role in meeting the specialized educational, religious, and other personal needs of a segment of the school population.

Indeed, the success that many private schools claim (as well as their marketing appeal to parents) is based on the stratification, homogeneity, and selectivity that enable some of them to produce better results than most public schools. By contrast, public schools guarantee an opportunity to all, offer diverse programming, and serve a population with diverse needs, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

However, the infusion of billions of dollars of public funds into the private school market will give rise to the need for regulation and accountability to protect the public's interest in the use of its funds for the education of so many children. Further, vouchers will change the kinds of private schools that will enter the marketplace and the way private schools operate and compete for students. That is, vouchers will make it easier for poorly run schools to stay in business and will invite more operators into the field who are driven by marketing and the profits to be derived from taxpayer subsidies—with less financial accountability to parents. Vouchers mean additional private school regulation and public accountability of private education.

In addition to financial accountability, private schools should expect regulation in the areas of marketing, reporting to parents, student selection (on basis of race, religion, disability, academic ability, social class, or special needs), admission tests (which most secondary private schools require), dismissal practices, tuition charges, teacher certification, course requirements, and curriculum standards. Pressure for fairness and equity in the use of public dollars also might lead to creating individual rights of appeal to public bodies over such decisions as the denial of admissions or the expulsion of students. Certainly, there would be a public interest in achieving financial equity among schools participating in vouchers.

As a result, private schools could face many of the same regulatory burdens public schools face—and, over time, they could lose the unique role that they play.

The conservative Cato Institute, which supports vouchers, published a 1997 policy analysis entitled "Vouchers and Educational Freedom—A Debate," in which Douglas Dewey agreed that vouchers would produce more regulation, higher costs, and less academic diversity among private schools, using examples from higher education and K-12 experiences in European countries that substantially subsidize their private schools. (See discussion on page 35.)

SUMMARY

REASONS TO OPPOSE VOUCHERS

I. Vouchers Undermine the Unique Value of Public Education

A. Public Education Is About Individual Opportunity
1. Public schools uniquely provide equal educational and social opportunity.
2. Public schools are uniquely tied to economic and social mobility.
3. Public schools are vehicles for realizing the American dream.

B. Public Education Is About Maintaining a Democracy
1. Public education uniquely equates with principles of equity, fairness, and opportunity.
2. Public education teaches America's common values, culture, and heritage.
3. Public education is the foundation of America's success.

II. Why Vouchers Won't Work

A. Vouchers Weaken Public Education
1. Vouchers will undermine, not improve, public education.
2. Vouchers encourage policymakers to give up on public education.
3. Vouchers will erode support for public education.

B. Vouchers Undermine Opportunity for All
1. Vouchers weaken the commitment to universal educational opportunity.
2. Vouchers are not about universal choice.
3. Vouchers will reduce equity in educational opportunity.

C. Vouchers Waste Taxpayers' Dollars
1. Vouchers will force taxpayers to support two education systems.
2. Vouchers will create a new entitlement program that ultimately benefits the rich.

D. Vouchers Promote a Divided America
1. Vouchers will lead to the balkanization of American education and culture.
2. Vouchers will resegregate American education.
3. Vouchers would tear down the wall that separates church and state.

E. Other Reasons Vouchers Won't Work
1. Vouchers are a marginal strategy.
2. Vouchers will invite the regulation of private education.

RESPONDING TO PRO-VOUCHER ARGUMENTS

As the preceding chapter suggests, the general public needs to understand vouchers for what they are: a blow to education and equal opportunity. At the same time, though, supporters of public education need to be able to address a number of arguments voucher proponents are likely to make. Specifically, proponents' arguments fall into four general categories:

1. Slogans with popular appeal, such as rallying around terms like choice and competition;
2. Exaggerated predictions of how vouchers will benefit low-income and minority populations;
3. Faulty claims that vouchers will save taxpayers and public schools money; and
4. Fallacious comparisons to other programs, such as food stamps and the GI bill.

1. Vouchers: A Campaign of Slogans

"Free-Market Choice"

The Argument: Vouchers will empower parents as consumers to compare an array of schools and make the best decision for their own children. This market-driven approach, comparable to the purchase of other products and services, will cause all public and private schools to become more receptive to meeting the needs of their customers. By contrast, because today's public schools have a financial lock on the use of tax dollars, all but a few parents are forced to accept their neighborhood public school, regardless of the quality of the program or its responsiveness to the unique needs of their children.

Response. The choice argument rests on the fallacious premises that: (1) vouchers will provide all parents with a meaningful choice; (2) parental choice is related to educational improvement; and (3) individual choices through vouchers will equate with the overall public interest society has in the education of its citizenry.

First, vouchers do not provide meaningful choices to all. Even with a voucher, the tuition cost at the best private schools will be out of the reach of low-income parents. Specifically, the choice for many low-income parents will be to take their voucher to a private school that is operating at a per-pupil cost equal to the voucher (generally $2,000-$3,000 per year), which is no choice at all. If there are educational benefits to voucher financing, they will be disproportionately tied to higher-income levels.

Second, choice does not equate with educational improvement. The argument simplistically assumes that a once-a-year "choice" by parents, as distinguished from what occurs day-to-day in classrooms and families, is what makes some schools more successful than others. But even where alternative programming benefits a child whose parents choose private school, the relationship between that choice and the improvement of the public school is based on a set of false assumptions about competition. (See next section.)

Further, in the open market, some parents' choice in schools will be influenced by the institution's representations, its ethnic or religious appeal, and not just the quality of education that is actually provided. Yet choices based on these factors are hardly relevant to academic achievement or to improving the public schools.

Third, individual choice does not necessarily equate with the overall public interest. Private schools can cater to or exclude certain segments of the population, or they can teach values and subjects that are not necessarily related to the broad goals and beliefs of society. To the extent vouchers create a marketplace that encourages those kinds of schools, the end result will not necessarily serve the public's interest in preparing students for society.

In dealing with a service as complex as education, choice in an unregulated marketplace will not mean that the best education is being provided. Experience with the savings and loan industry, the tobacco industry, and certain bargain airlines indicates that in the absence of adequate protection, market-driven appeals to consumer motivations do not result either in the best, or even safest, products or services for the consumer or the taxpayers.

In short, the free-market argument has emotional appeal, but it is a distraction from the point that vouchers will weaken the public schools, which will continue to enroll the vast majority of students.

"Competition" for Public Schools

The Argument. The threat of enabling parents to take funds from the public schools to enroll their child elsewhere will force public schools to improve. By comparison, public schools currently have no incentive to do better.

Response. Vouchers clearly are not about improving public education through competition. Paradoxically, if not hypocritically, vouchers will weaken the performance edge of public schools. Not only will public schools have fewer financial resources because of vouchers; they also stand to lose their best students, their most engaged parents, and, in turn, their most effective teachers.

"Competition" among schools won't lead to excellence for other reasons as well. For example, there is no established relationship between competition and effective teaching. Indeed, people who become educators don't do so to compete with each other, nor is competition the best foundation for learning. Improving teacher training, allowing schools to provide a disciplinary climate that is conducive to learning, and providing special services for children whose learning is impaired by poverty or other factors will do more to improve student achievement than will a system based on competition among adults.

The fallacy of the competition argument becomes apparent when viewed in the context of the big cities. For example, as a result of family moves, student turnover in many urban schools can reach 50 percent per year (which is bound to influence student performance). Since teachers are unlikely to know the reasons individual students are leaving or coming back, they are unlikely to recognize which transfers result from "competition." Moreover, while some cities, such as Philadelphia, have the nation's highest percentages of parochial school enrollments (including poor children), their public schools still do not outperform other cities or other poor districts where the private school presence is significantly lower. Other cities, such as New York, are experiencing enrollment explosions and don't have adequate space in the public schools. Obviously, competition is not a relevant factor.

Parent Control Over Tax Dollars and Double Taxation

The Argument. Taxpaying parents should have more control over how their tax dollars for education are spent. Further, by being denied that opportunity, private school parents are being forced to pay taxes for another child's education, as well as their own child's, which amounts to double taxation.

Response. These arguments ignore the fact that society, through representative government and collective taxation, provides education and other services that advance the public good—and that society wants public accountability for these services.

By channeling tax dollars into private schools, the control that all taxpayers currently have over the expenditure of these funds (through representative government) would be shifted to individual consumer-driven choices. In effect, vouchers will disenfranchise voters and prevent them from having any say over the education program they support with their tax dollars, including any say in the quality, content, religious orientation, or moral values a particular school selects—or how well the greater public interest is served.

Further, in most cases, any voucher of meaningful size not only would represent the tax contribution a parent makes to educate one or more of his children, it also would include the contribution all other taxpayers make. Individual taxpayers cannot argue that these funds are exclusively theirs any more than they can argue that they have an exclusive interest in American education or an exclusive right to determine how these public funds are spent.

The fallacy in arguing that a voucher exclusively consists of a parent's tax dollars would become readily apparent if the parent became dissatisfied with a private school halfway through the school year or if the school closed. Would the parent then believe that his tax-paid voucher was used up, or would the parent insist that his child be enrolled in a public school or another private school at additional taxpayer expense?

When citizens make decisions to privately purchase other services or commodities, such as security protection, private roads, or automobiles, they do not get a voucher drawn against the public budget for police protection, highways, or public transit. The private purchase of those items hardly amounts to double taxation. Similarly, parents who enroll their children in private school are not being taxed a second time. Rather, they have made a free choice to purchase a private service that is separate from the societal obligation they share with their neighbors (some of whom don't even have children) to provide a mechanism (public schools) to educate the public as a whole.

2. Vouchers: Exaggerated Benefits for Low-Income and Minority Populations

Opening Up Choices for Minorities and Low-Income Families

The Argument. Vouchers will provide minority and low-income families with more choices and will give their children more opportunity for success. By contrast, poor-performing public schools in low-income minority areas, especially in large cities, deny these parents and their children an equal opportunity to succeed. As a result, these children are being held hostage to the public school "plantation," thereby making vouchers a compelling civil rights issue. In essence, vouchers provide a benefit to low-income minorities that white middle-class Americans already enjoy in their upscale public and private schools.

Response. This argument, which has a powerful emotional appeal, is misleading on several grounds.

First, it assumes that low-income children in poor neighborhoods will be able to use the voucher to enroll in high-quality private schools. But even with a voucher worth $3,000, many low-income children will wind up in racially isolated neighborhood schools operating with marginal resources.

Second, private schools will be in a position to substantially screen out students they deem undesirable on the basis of low academic ability (24 percent of private schools use admissions exams), poor discipline records, or high-cost special needs.

Third, vouchers will have a more beneficial impact on parents who can afford to enroll their children at schools that will be out of financial reach for low-income families—even with a voucher.

Fourth, for children who remain in public schools, including those whose educational achievement is impeded by poor health, family problems, and lack of support services, vouchers will add no value to those children's education while depleting the resources currently available to them.

President Clinton's Choice

The Argument. The President of the United States enrolled his daughter in a private school rather than sending her to a public school in the District of Columbia. If the President didn't have to send his daughter to a public school in a struggling school system, why shouldn't less fortunate parents have the same choice?

Response. President Clinton did choose to enroll his daughter, Chelsea, in Sidwell Friends School—a private school that caters to the nation's wealthiest and most socially prominent families at a tuition that compares to private universities.

But the debate over vouchers isn't about whether America's most affluent citizens should be allowed to pay the cost of an elite private academy. In a free and capitalistic society, people should be able to purchase whatever services they can afford—even if public alternatives are available. Voucher proponents clearly aren't arguing that all inner-city poor should be publicly financed to attend schools like Sidwell Friends (assuming these youngsters would be accepted).

While President Clinton did not enroll his daughter in the District of Columbia public schools, he also didn't enroll her in a religiously oriented school or a storefront school either. Yet these schools, which can vary in religious intensity and academic quality, are the most likely publicly funded alternatives that vouchers would provide for most parents in the District.

Help for Low-Income Parents Whose Children are Currently in Private School

The Argument. In communities where the public schools are considered inadequate, low-income parents are already making huge financial sacrifices to send their children to parochial schools. For these parents, arguments about the public good are secondary to the needs of their own children and the financial burden placed upon them. Why not help these parents with a voucher based on family income?

Response. Even if a voucher helps one low-income parent, that help always will come at the expense of public school children. The argument isn't about whether one parent should be helped, but whether vouchers are the best strategy to improve the education of all students.

For example, if the environment at a Catholic school (or a nearby public school) is more conducive to learning than the neighborhood public school, the best strategy would be to determine how that environment can be replicated in the struggling public school. Not only would this end the need for the parent to pay private school tuition, it would benefit all children in the public school.

Rather than seeking a short-term, counterproductive political strategy of initially buying off a relatively small number of parents, state legislators should increase their commitment to the public schools— where 90 percent of the students are enrolled. To accomplish this goal, state legislators must provide public school officials with the flexibility, authority, and resources they need.

3. Faulty Claims That Taxpayers and Public Education Will Save Money

Saving Money for Public Education

The Argument. Public schools would be better off under most voucher plans because they would keep a portion of their per-pupil funds that exceed the amount of the voucher. For example, if a school spends $6,000 per pupil and if a $3,000 voucher causes a school system to lose half of those funds, it still has $3,000 left over and one less pupil to educate. To prove that private school enrollments save money for public schools, voucher advocates also argue that urban public schools would be unable financially to handle the influx of students that might occur if private schools had to close their doors.

Response. School systems won't make money from vouchers. The moment a voucher program takes effect, school districts will lose an amount necessary to pay for all children in their jurisdiction who already attend private schools. Indeed, under the California proposal, school districts would have lost 10 percent of their budget just to pay for the existing private school enrollment.

Then, as each additional child leaves the public classrooms, the fixed costs, such as operating the building, continue. Further, unless there is a mass exodus, so will such costs of paying that child's teacher, running the school buses, etc. The only difference is that the school will have less money to pay for these items. Additionally, on top of the voucher payment, a school district could lose its share of other state funding because the student is no longer enrolled at the public school. That was how the California voucher proposal was structured.

Although it might be possible, hypothetically, to show that a public school could financially benefit, the opposite result will occur in virtually every case. Hence, taxpayers will not save money. Indeed, they will actually have to spend more if they do not want services to be cut in public schools.

Some urban school districts that have a large parochial school presence would be financially challenged if parochial schools failed and public schools had to accommodate their enrollment. However, there is a difference between a public school having to pay the additional costs of enrolling all parochial students (especially if it doesn't have space) and its losing money through a voucher to support private schools for their existing and new enrollments.

Once voucher programs are in place, the per-pupil cost of educating the students who remain in public schools is likely to escalate as well, especially as private schools are likely to reject high-cost students, such as those who have disabilities or those with limited knowledge of English.

Saving Taxpayers' Money

The Argument. Vouchers will save taxpayers' money because private education is less costly than public education. To support this point, voucher advocates compare private school tuition and the higher per-pupil expenditure in the public schools.

Response. First, many private schools don't cost less than public schools. In fact, the costs at some elite private schools can equal those at many universities. Second, in cases where private schools do spend less than public schools, that gap will narrow over time as these schools seek additional public subsidies to fund the cost of : (1) transportation and other support services, (2) programs for children with disabilities, (3) reporting and other accountability requirements, and (4) competitive salaries for employees. (In 1997, lay parochial school teachers in Philadelphia, Pa., and Camden, N.J., struck over salaries.)

In essence, the public will be under pressure to subsidize parallel school systems—with all of the inefficiencies that would follow. Additionally, the public will have to pay the new cost of operating the bureaucracy that will be needed to implement a voucher program—which on a national basis will start with nearly 4.8 million children currently in private schools. As private schools come under increasing pressure to meet more educational and operating standards, all to be reviewed by public agencies, the cost of the bureaucracy needed to oversee the public interest will rise as well.

In arguing that vouchers will save taxpayers money, voucher proponents frequently compare private school tuition rates with public school per-pupil expenditures. This comparison is extremely misleading, though, because tuition is only one source of a private school's revenue. For example, private school students may pay for both books and activity fees separate from tuition. Among the other sources of revenue that private schools draw on are the following:

Church contributions. Church contributions and fundraising accounted for 56 percent of the cost of church-affiliated elementary schools in 1980. Likewise, more elite private schools frequently benefit from large endowments and bequests that hold tuition costs down.

State aid. States or local school districts frequently provide services to private schools, such as transportation (which can account for 10 percent of student costs), standardized tests, special services (such as Title I), and special education. However, because public funds do not currently flow to private institutions, estimates of private school spending typically do not include the cost of these services. In some instances, too, the public school system incurs these costs and adds them to its per-pupil expenditure rate and to the number of administrators it employs. (Private schools ironically brag that they don't have this bureaucracy.)

Off-set of indirect costs. Regardless of cost accounting procedures, private schools located inside sponsoring entities, such as churches, receive services and benefits that simply don't show up as costs of education.

Discounts for surplus property. Private schools frequently receive deep discounts (or low auction prices) on surplus property, equipment, and materials originally bought as new by public schools.

Special education. Under federal law, local school districts must provide special services to children with disabilities at a level that is appropriate to meet their needs. Overall, school districts serve 5.4 million handicapped children (12 percent of the student population) at an average per-pupil cost that exceeds $12,000 per year, or twice the regular school program. (Some children's needs will cost $50,000 or more.) This comes to an extra $30 billion in annual costs to the public schools. Private schools have no such requirement, though. Accordingly, they accept far fewer handicapped students and typically serve only those students who can be educated at

lower cost. Frequently, too, they provide such services through referrals that are paid by the local public schools.

Employee salaries. Salaries account for one of the most significant differences in the cost of public vs. private education. In 1993-1994, public school teachers (who are better educated than their private school counterparts) received an average salary of $34,153 compared to $21,968 in private schools. Some of this disparity is attributed to the higher salaries paid to secondary school teachers—who are disproportionately fewer in private schools.

Other factors. Other factors also make it misleading to compare bottom-line costs of private and public education. Private schools disproportionately serve children in lower grade levels, in part because secondary education (especially comprehensive high schools that offer vocational programs, science labs, and other programs) is much more expensive. Public schools also provide a broad range of non-education services and alternative programming for children that private schools don't provide.

4. Fallacious Comparisons to Other Programs

Comparison to Voucher Programs for Food, Housing, and Health Services

The Argument. Government vouchers have been used successfully in other areas without posing the difficulties that public school advocates allege will occur in education. For example, recipients of food stamps are not forced to shop at government stores; instead, they shop at private sector supermarkets. Medicaid recipients are not required to go to government doctors but may select physicians on the open market. Subsidized rent vouchers work much better than forcing low-income families to live only in government-operated public housing.

Response. In the examples cited, all are welfare entitlements for the poor. Education is not a welfare program, and certainly education vouchers should not create a welfare entitlement for the rich.

In each of these three areas, the voucher does not result in directly undermining public services to other citizens; however, the education voucher would.

Further, welfare entitlement programs operate in highly regulated private industries. (Many of the political leaders who called for welfare reform in 1995-1996 pointed to the substantial regulation that was needed to address private sector abuses.) For an intangible and dynamic service such as education, the level of regulation needed would be extremely high and costly. Ironically, many of the same politicians who sought to limit welfare entitlements in voucher-like programs for food, housing, and medical services are now arguing to create a similar program in education.

Vouchers Are Like the GI Bill or a Pell Grant for Elementary and Secondary Education

The Argument. To demonstrate that vouchers would be a benign force in K-12 education, proponents compare vouchers to the GI bill and Pell grants. These programs successfully provided higher educational opportunities to millions of young adults without raising problems of religious conflict, elitism, or need for strict public oversight, voucher advocates say. So why not expand the successful concept to K-12 education?

Response. The GI bill and Pell grants are fundamentally different from K-12 vouchers.

First, the objective behind the GI bill and Pell grants was to open higher education to young adults who had no tuition-free university to attend. By contrast, voucher proponents do not offer K-12 vouchers to promote universal enrollment, which already exists, but as a strategy to improve student achievement. As such, vouchers should not even be compared with student assistance programs in higher education. Rather, vouchers should be compared with true efforts to improve the public schools, such as professional development, remedial programs, and regulatory waivers.

Second, higher education emphasizes individual career development. By contrast, K-12 education is concerned with teaching a common curriculum and heritage to young children. Indeed, the issue is not whether vouchers are mechanically similar to college aid, but whether shifting students into disparate and unregulated privately controlled schools will better serve the broad public interest in the education, common values, and heritage taught to its young.

Third, college aid programs do not violate the separation of church and state, but a K-12 voucher program that includes religious institutions would because of the age of the children involved and the potential—if not the explicit mission—parochial schools have to inculcate religious beliefs.

Fourth, the need to regulate and oversee publicly financed vouchers will far exceed that for university student aid programs. Private or parochial K-12 schools that receive vouchers will not operate in the public eye. More like proprietary schools than like universities, K-12 voucher-receiving schools set up a situation where justified concern over fraud and abuse and the need to regulate will be high.

SUMMARY

RESPONDING TO PRO-VOUCHER ARGUMENTS

A good campaign keeps the crucial role of public education constantly before the public and points to the flaws with vouchers. It is also important to recognize and rebut some of the key arguments voucher proponents make.

Voucher "buzz words" such as competition and choice are hollow slogans that can distract the public from the defects of vouchers.

I. Low-income and minority populations will not be the primary beneficiaries of a universal voucher program.

II. Low-income and minority populations will not be adequately served by a means-tested voucher.

III. Vouchers will cost—not save—money for taxpayers and public schools.

IV. Education vouchers are different from other vouchers (e.g., food stamps) and higher education aid programs (e.g., the GI bill). Comparisons are invalid.

BUILDING A WINNING CAMPAIGN AGAINST VOUCHERS

Vouchers cannot be intellectualized away. Instead, defeating vouchers will require the careful and persistent work that is the hallmark of any successful political campaign.

Once you're familiar with the arguments for and against vouchers, you and your fellow board members will need to decide which points to emphasize with specific audiences, including parent groups, business roundtables, the public as a whole, newspaper editors, and state legislators. Like most political campaigns, defeating vouchers will require the ability to deliver a consistent message to target audiences and to build a broad coalition of supporters to deliver that message.

Tips to Consider

Samples of actual campaign materials appear in Appendices H-J, but keep the following tips in mind as you build your own campaign:

1. ***Work with your state school boards association and consult with NSBA for additional information.*** Because most voucher programs would be created by federal or state legislation or through a statewide referendum, local school boards should tie their strategies to the broader campaigns their state school boards association might be conducting. (In the case of federal legislation, local school boards should coordinate their efforts with NSBA.)

2. ***Define your target audience and tailor your message to its members.*** Your voucher campaign must grab the attention of the voters who are most likely to support you. It must get them to the polls and convince them to carry the message to the public or the state legislature in the months leading up to voting day.

You won't win the campaign, though, if you only preach to the choir, especially in a voter referendum. In building your campaign, then, identify arguments that are most likely to appeal to members of the general public, which might have only cursory knowledge of what's at stake and which is unlikely to respond to "insider" appeals. For example, members of the general public will be more concerned that vouchers will be a tax grab for the rich than that some teachers may lose their jobs if public school enrollment declines.

And what about arch supporters of vouchers? Should you try to win them over? If you're facing a referendum fight, your best bet might be to listen to their arguments but not try to placate them. No matter what you do, you're probably not going to convert the most strident voucher advocates—and if you try to do so, you'll risk obscuring the core message you're trying to send to the general public.

In a legislative fight, however, you should never discount a state or federal lawmaker. If a legislator who supports vouchers has a specific substantive point, provide the information needed to counter that assertion. (The material that appears in the appendices will help here.) In addition, many legislators will not want to risk re-election over this issue. If a legislator who supports vouchers hears enough opposition through the media and from your other target audiences, he or she may decide it would be politically safer if the measure did not come up for a vote or that providing high-profile advocacy to build support would be unwise.

Taking voucher opponents for granted at the state or federal level also would be a mistake. If anti-voucher legislators hear only from voucher proponents, they may be tempted to switch

positions or give voucher advocates support on key procedural votes, amendments, or pilot programs so they can play both sides.

3. ***Use polling data to develop your message.*** As discussed throughout this section, developing a coherent message is crucial. One way of determining which aspects of vouchers are most important to the general public (or to other target audiences) is through polling. Although most public school advocates will not be able to do local polling, state school boards associations and their state coalition partners often have helpful polling information. (When local advocates engage in polling, they should report findings to their state school boards association.)

4. ***Use polling data to select the words to frame the debate.*** Polling data often show that the words selected to describe vouchers will influence the public's perception of the issue. Where a referendum is involved, a large portion of the public will make a snap decision. (This will be especially true among the 70 percent of households that don't have children in school.) Moreover, those decisions frequently will be driven by political spin, not in-depth analysis. Voucher proponents know the value of slogans in a political campaign. That is why they use messages like competition, choice, and scholarship grants.

Although public opinion is always changing, state school boards associations have used the following phrases, or message points, successfully in recent years:

- "Vouchers are vouchers." Using the term "vouchers" paints the picture of the kind of welfare entitlement programs that are out of favor with a large segment of the public. For that reason, during the 1996 political campaign, voucher proponents attempted to switch the terminology to "tuition scholarships" and to make benign comparisons between vouchers and the GI bill.

- "Government entitlement for the wealthy." The public does not respond well to proposals that appear to benefit the wealthy, so vouchers lose public support when they're characterized as a public subsidy or government entitlement program to help wealthy parents send their children to elite private schools.

- "Tax dollars to promote religion." The public still believes in the separation of church and state and will be more inclined to oppose vouchers if they are characterized as using tax funds to advance religious instruction.

- "No accountability for a tax give-away." The public wants accountability for the use of taxpayer dollars. Make the point that private schools—including those that are operated for religious purposes or for a profit—would involve the use of millions of dollars in taxpayer funds in your state. Yet there is no public accountability for how private schools spend the vouchers or profit from them.

5. ***Use negative and repetitive messages with the general public.*** While it is important to advance the unique value of public education, public opposition to vouchers in previous campaigns was most effectively shaped by negative messages, i.e., hitting at what's wrong with the other side (see point 4 above).

Once the message is developed, it should be simplified and repeated over and over. In fact, experience shows that too many message points confuse rather than make the case.

For the most part, in advertisements and even in interactive debate, appeals to the general public should emphasize your core message showing the weakness of the other side. While responses to arguments from the other side may be useful, they should not be elevated to compete with your offense—unless the other side is picking up support with a particular message, and, therefore, requires a response.

6. ***Try to influence the way the proposal will be worded on a referendum.*** If you are not successful in stopping a referendum from being presented to the voters, then the actual wording of the proposal becomes important. Rather than settling for benign or obscure wording, lobby to include words like "vouchers," "religious institutions," "unregulated," and "all income levels" (assuming these points are the purpose and effect of the proposal) in the actual language of the voucher initiative that voters will see in the voting booth.

7. ***Build state and local coalitions.*** Voucher proponents will be approaching business groups, state legislators, and even governors with their message. Public school advocates need to do the same. (Persuading your governor to oppose vouchers, or at least neutralizing his or her desire to actively support a measure, can be crucial in a referendum fight and is especially useful in addressing legislation.) Undoubtedly, your coalition will include local school board members, teachers, and administrators. But to be effective, you'll also want to make certain that lawmakers hear from other groups, especially parents and business leaders.

8. ***Appeal to the local business community.*** Terms like "competition" and "consumer choice" will be attractive to the business community. But local business leaders have a stake in their communities that should not be clouded by these slogans. If a community wants to attract new business and retain its highest-achieving citizens, its public schools must be attractive to both business and families. The business community must understand that vouchers are not really about competition and choice, but are a strategy that will weaken the public schools, divide the community, reduce property values, and hurt economic growth.

Members of the business community also should understand that their community is not as likely to attract new residents on the strength of its religious schools. Further, local businesses are less likely to be able to influence the direction of religious schools than they are to shape their public schools.

The business community can be a school district's biggest supporter or its biggest critic. In addition to reaching out to business leaders to help defeat vouchers, make sure to take steps to keep business leaders informed and involved in your school district. Your community's business leaders need to be knowledgeable and involved stakeholders in the public schools.

9. ***Involve the religious community.*** Make sure your coalition members include the many religious organizations and churches in your community that do not support vouchers. Such groups can help you bring their own members on board—and they can boost your credibility among the public at large.

10. ***Learn enough about the voucher program that's being proposed so that you can show actual local examples of the negative impact it would have on your schools.*** How much money in state aid would your local school district lose? Will you have to allocate a specific amount per pupil? Does the voucher proposal authorize the creation of new private schools that enroll only a few students? Does it include teacher certification requirements? Overall, what is the likely local impact?

11. ***Identify effective spokespersons.*** From across your coalition, identify individuals who can speak out with clear, hard-hitting messages, and who are credible with key audiences. In a voucher campaign, appeals to values and emotions, as well as the use of well-honed sound bites, count as much as facts and reasoning do.

An Ongoing Effort to Inform the Public

In criticizing public education, voucher advocates know that overblown appeals built around emotionally charged words like "discipline," "safety," "drugs," and "academic failure" will resonate with the public. And they know that words like "market competition" and "consumer choice" are attractive—and imply that the opposite is true of the public schools.

An information campaign about your school system's own success stories should set the record straight.

In the last two national elections, public opinion polls showed that voters didn't react well to big government, big bureaucracy, or controls from Washington, D.C. While the intense voter hostility exhibited in the 1994 election to these points abated somewhat in 1996, voucher proponents may still find it valuable to characterize public schools as "government schools" that are in the control of the "Education Establishment." The U.S. Department of Education, the National Education Association, the "bureaucracy," and "the status quo" have also been assailed as parts of the anti-big government/big institution message. To defuse these powerful slogans, make voters aware that your schools are community schools. Tell voters how dynamic your local schools are and how many innovations are under way. Emphasize, too, that your community school district is governed by elected citizens; that there is substantial citizen involvement, possibly including local site governance; that the federal government controls very little outside the area of civil rights; and that the national unions do not run your schools.

Overall, the best defense against vouchers are citizens who are informed and involved in their public schools. For that reason, local school boards should, with the involvement of their local community, assess their school district's program, publish their goals, and discuss their successes and their failures along with their plans for future action.

For too long, school officials either have ignored false attacks on their schools or believed that responses were inappropriate or unnecessary. That is a bad strategy. Indeed, addressing false charges is just as necessary as telling the full story about your schools. Nearly three-fourths of the households in most communities do not have children in school. The attention-getting headlines, the letters-to-the-editors, or the issues discussed on talk-radio frequently are anecdotal and selected for their "shock" value. Someone who is not familiar with your schools is likely to take these anecdotes as fact.

SUMMARY

A CHECKLIST OF CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

Be sure to coordinate your activities with your state school boards association and NSBA.

- **Build local coalitions with:**
  - parents
  - local educators
  - the business community
  - senior citizens
  - the religious community
  - civic organizations
  - special populations in the local community
  - other public officials and spokespersons
- **Define target audiences and go after votes needed to win. Tailor your message to:**
  - the general public
  - coalition partners
  - the media
  - legislators and the governor
  - specific groups of voters
- **Develop a message:**
  - listen to the public
  - use polling
  - tie your message to the public
  - narrow your message to key points
  - don't overload your message with too many main points
  - respond to the other side only when necessary
  - address legislators' arguments and concerns
- **Target the media:**
  - meet with editorial boards
  - write op-ed articles
  - submit letters-to-the-editors
  - appear on local radio/TV talk-shows
- **Educate the public:**
  - reach out to coalition members
  - display bumper stickers and signs
  - make vouchers an agenda item at school board meetings
  - speak at membership meetings of coalition partners
  - hold meetings with target audiences
- **Connect with legislators:**
  - set up coalition meetings with legislators
  - launch a letter-writing and call-in campaign
  - provide legislators with news clippings opposing vouchers
  - invite legislators into your schools
  - invite legislators to meet with the membership of coalition partners
- **Raise funds:**
  - determine your needs early
  - estimate the costs of your campaign
  - identify fund-raising sources
  - identify sources of in-kind contributions
  - contact state association leaders to determine any legal requirements

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The debate on vouchers involves several special issues that have not been addressed so far or that require additional comments. These issues are as follows:

1. The research on voucher programs
2. The success of public school choice programs
3. Voucher programs in urban school systems
4. The case against federal vouchers

The Research on Voucher Programs

Voucher proponents argue two points: (1) that private schools are superior to public schools, and (2) that past or current experience with various choice programs proves that vouchers will succeed. The evidence does not exist to prove either contention.

In comparing public and private schools, voucher advocates frequently cite raw statistics that do not account for factors, such as family income or parental involvement, that distinguish private and public school students and significantly influence student achievement. As a result, even where private school students might outperform their public school counterparts, those results don't necessarily mean that the private schools those youngsters attend are superior.

Within low-income populations, parents who send their children to a private school are, on the whole, better educated, expect more from their children, and are more involved with their children's education than their public school counterparts. Some data show that low- income parents who seek vouchers may tend to have fewer children per household than do their public school counterparts. In short, low-income parents who seek vouchers as an alternative for their children are more committed and better able to support their children's education— which in itself will influence student achievement.

Social science researchers agree that statistically valid techniques (such as regression analysis) can factor out at least some of the elements that would misrepresent differences in performance between public and private schools. In fact, when family profiles and other factors are considered, research consistently shows either no significant advantage to private school enrollment, or gains too small to merit a program as risky and untested as private sector vouchers.

With respect to various experimental voucher projects, the evidence is either inconclusive or doesn't exist. Although voucher programs have been initiated in several large cities, it will take several years before policymakers and education leaders can draw conclusions about the merits of these projects.

Even Milwaukee's voucher program, which began in 1990, has not yielded clear results. On one side, University of Wisconsin researcher John F. Witte found that students in the program did not show statistically significant improvement. On the other side, Harvard University researcher Paul Peterson found that by the third year, low-income students—who were admitted into the voucher program by lottery—did show "substantively significant" gains over other low-income applicants who stayed in the public schools.

Peterson criticizes Witte's work on the grounds that children in the Milwaukee voucher program, all of whom came from low-income backgrounds, were compared with all children in the Milwaukee system—not just low-income children.

Witte criticizes Peterson's work on the grounds that about 30 percent of the children dropped out of the program each year, a group that could include children who were encouraged to leave. Further, Peterson only reported "a substantively significant" gain by children enrolled in the private schools, not a "statistically significant" difference in performance, which would be the accepted research standard. The term "substantively significant" has no meaning in the world of social statistical analysis. Further, researchers criticize Peterson's sample base. For example, only seven of Milwaukee's 12 voucher schools were studied, and 80 percent of the students examined were enrolled in just three of those schools. Likewise, the study involved a total of only 110 students, comparing students selected in Milwaukee's admissions lottery with those who were not selected. That means the sample base was hardly large enough to draw conclusions about the program or to establish public policy on a statewide or national basis.

Indeed, a clear and statistically valid success story has not emerged after seven years of voucher experiments. A policy brief produced by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) titled "Who Gains, Who Loses from School Choice: A Research Summary," said it best. Have vouchers led to improved academic performance? According to NCSL, after three years looking into the program, the short answer is no.

The Success of Public School Choice Programs

Voucher proponents also argue that the charter school movement demonstrates that vouchers—as a similar choice program—would be a success. Here again, other than a few anecdotal accounts, there is little evidence to demonstrate that children enrolled in private charter schools are performing significantly better than those enrolled in regular public school programs. Moreover, charter schools overwhelmingly operate under the aegis of the public schools. If public charter schools do prove to be a success, it will be a tribute to those in public education who were involved with the charters (and the freedom from regulation granted by the states). It won't be an indication that vouchers would work as well or better.

Likewise, advocates point to success stories from other choice programs, such as specialty magnet schools and interdistrict enrollment plans, as justification for extending publicly funded choice programs to the private sector through vouchers. In so doing they also create voter confusion between public school choice and vouchers, which they call choice programs as well. Here again, voucher proponents are trying to use the public schools' successes for their own ends. Public schools need to reclaim their own successes.

Voucher Programs in Urban School Systems

In some states voucher proponents are seeking a foot in the door for vouchers by limiting their proposals to low-income families, especially those who live in troubled urban school districts.

In states that are unlikely to enact a universal voucher program, this approach allows proponents to minimize political opposition. Further, by targeting their proposals to low-income urban families, voucher proponents (who are generally regarded as politically conservative) can broaden their appeal to liberals and others who view vouchers as a mechanism to provide low-income families (especially minorities) with a financial benefit otherwise reserved for middle- and high-income families.

This approach also is buttressed by the powerful civil rights argument that ineffective urban public schools prevent minorities from receiving the quality of education available to white students in other school districts. Further, voucher proponents are likely to assert without substantiation that 40 percent of urban teachers already choose to enroll their own children in private schools.

Clearly, though, a voucher program for low-income families living in urban areas isn't the ultimate goal of most voucher proponents. If a voucher program is established in a city, it will only be a matter of time before a campaign is launched to stretch vouchers to include more school districts and higher-income families. In the meantime, the debate will create a distraction from addressing the real issues and real solutions to the challenges facing poor children in urban American.

Vouchers will not solve the family, health, and social problems today's poor children face. Vouchers will not provide professional development for teachers, buy new textbooks, or repair a leaky roof. Vouchers will simply become an excuse for not assisting the vast majority of needy students who will remain in public schools.

The Case Against Federal Vouchers

Several times since 1981, Congress has considered programs to fund vouchers in education. During the 1980s the approach taken was to reallocate funds from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which supports programs for educationally disadvantaged children. The argument is made that using Title I funds for private school vouchers would provide options for poor children who were not succeeding in the public schools.

More recently, proposals were introduced to incorporate education vouchers within economic enterprise zones. These proposals gave a community economic development rationale to vouchers. In 1997, another proposal was introduced that would provide a separate federal funding stream for a limited number of urban vouchers, as well as the authority for school districts to channel funds from several existing federal programs (most notably Title VI, the former Chapter 2 program) to support vouchers. The rationale behind this proposal was that vouchers provide a means of escape for low-income students who feared for their safety because of violence or drugs in their schools. (In other words, the primary emphasis was not on academic achievement, but on another politically charged negative message: safety in public schools.)

Although these proposals may not have the same impact as a statewide voucher program, they would have a very significant impact on select school districts, most notably in urban and low-income areas. Further, by virtue of being debated in Congress, these proposals provide a national forum to broadly characterize public schools as being unable to rise to the standards of academic performance and school safety. Congressional action and national attention also encourage state legislators to follow suit.

In addition to the flaws that would be generally applicable to vouchers, each of these programs has unique defects. These defects are summarized below:

- For Fiscal Year 1997 Congress appropriated approximately $7.2 billion in local Title I grants, which are aimed at the most educationally needy children in the poorest neighborhoods in the poorest school districts. Although Title I was not targeted by voucher proponents in recent years, the ramifications involving this very issue probably should be discussed, since it may be targeted again.

In essence, Title I serves the neediest of the needy— those disadvantaged children most at risk and least likely to show improvement. Based on previous bills, federal vouchers would cut that support in half so that low-income children, regardless of whether they are the neediest of the educationally needy, could attend a private school that might enroll them.

Even if this program were limited to the most educationally disadvantaged children—and even if private schools were required to use open enrollment—such a voucher program would still be bad public policy because of the impact that the withdrawal of funds would have on those children remaining in the public schools. Title I is a critical-mass program that must operate at a level large enough to bring special resources into the classroom and to serve children over several years. To the extent that Title I funds are withdrawn from a school (along with the state funding that supports the child's general enrollment), both general programming and the special revenues available to the remaining children are weakened.

In recent years, minority children and children from the poorest families have made the greatest gains in test scores. While these factors are not precise proxies for involvement in Title I programs, the overlap is close enough for independent researchers, such as the Rand Corp., to conclude that the Title I program does make a difference.

The other major flaw in creating a federal voucher is tied to accountability. Unlike the current Title I program, in which a public agency provides services for children enrolled in the school, vouchers involve an actual transfer of cash. If the federal government is going to make nearly $4 billion directly available to the private sector, what level of accountability should it require, regardless of state oversight, to ensure that federal tax dollars are actually spent to educate the intended children and in a nonreligious manner?

- With regard to the empowerment zone proposals, grants would be available to mayors who agree to provide education vouchers. Beyond the other flaws inherent in voucher programs, this proposal in particular politicizes urban education and places mayors in the position of effectively running their own school program at the expense of local school systems. (In one-third of the nation's cities, the mayors control the school district budget.)

- The Safe and Affordable Schools bill, which would provide vouchers to students enrolled in schools where student discipline is a significant problem, also poses some unique problems. First, not only would voucher eligibility be tied to the media hype of disciplinary actions taken in schools, but it would work to punish schools and school districts financially for taking and reporting corrective action. Further, it may help a few students, but will not help fix the problem in the troubled public school— where many more students could be affected. Second, although student eligibility is tied to Title I schools, children who aren't in a Title I program could receive the voucher (if the school operates an innovation-oriented schoolwide project). That is, the least needy of children can take money to support private education that was intended for the most needy children. Third, the amount of the voucher is only limited by the tuition and fees charged by the private schools. Hence, a student could pull $10,000 out of a school—even though the Title I children in the program typically receives only a little more than $1,000 in services.

- During 1997, several other types of K-12 private school funding schemes were proposed, most notably the use of IRA funding accounts to enable parents to use tax-exempt profits on investments for tuition at such schools. Additionally, votes were taken to create a voucher program for the District of Columbia. Both measures were narrowly defeated and are expected to return for future votes.

In addressing the larger political context, public school advocates should consider the outcome of the 1996 elections. Conservative political analysts now believe that some of their national candidates lost votes because of their calls to abolish the U.S. Department of Education. These analysts have concluded that women, in particular, did not see eliminating the Education Department as a "big government" issue but as an effort to cut services for children with nothing else offered in return.

Hence, over the next two years, conservative politicians might heighten their emphasis on empowering parents through vouchers (i.e., tuition scholarships), rather than focus on eliminating the Department of Education or funding cuts. Indeed in some states, advocates might limit their voucher campaign to urban areas or defer to a softer approach, such as promoting private charter schools and thereby achieve the same results as vouchers.

Why Some Conservatives Worry About Vouchers

In an article in the March 12, 1997, issue of *Policy Analysis*, which is published by the Cato Institute, a conservative think tank, Douglas Dewey raised warnings about vouchers that, coming from this conservative source, should cause conservative legislators to think twice. Here are some of the points from Dewey's article. Although school board members may strongly disagree with some of Dewey's premises, his viewpoint may be helpful in discussions with pro-voucher legislators:

- Vouchers mean more government dependence by parents and private schools. Parents will spend more time advocating for money in legislative bodies, rather than emphasizing parents' rights and the need to be free from government control.

- In order to pass a politically palatable proposal, lawmakers are likely to propose voucher measures that require the accreditation of schools, certification of teachers, and defined standards relating to enrollment practices and curriculum. That is, a politically viable voucher means adding government controls and thereby converting private schools into a new kind of government school.

- By breaking down the funding barriers between government and private schools, private schools will become vulnerable to the same government-mandated "reforms" that Dewey says have damaged public education.

- In higher education, student loan programs and research grants have supported "political correctness," frivolous programs of study, and too much emphasis on research rather than student learning. According to Dewey, making vouchers available for private K-12 schools will produce similar results.

- Strong government support for private schools will lead to adherence to more government rules and eliminate their uniqueness. In his study of those nations where there is strong government support of private schools, Charles Glenn concluded that there were no non-religious differences between Catholic schools and other institutions. That 1989 report included France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada, and West Germany. Similar conclusions were reached by World Bank economist Estelle James in her 1994 survey that appeared in the International Encyclopedia of Education.

- If vouchers cannot be used to support religious institutions, religious schools will have to compromise their mission, especially if they believe that religion must be infused throughout curriculum. While a religious school does not have to accept a voucher, it might not be able to compete with other public and private schools unless it does.

- Conservatives themselves will insist on regulating voucher programs because of their commitment to public accountability for public spending.
- Educationally self-reliant families will become dependent upon vouchers. Further, the lack of sacrifice associated with family responsibility for education will weaken families.

In short, Dewy concludes, "Vouchers will decrease private school autonomy while increasing costs for everyone. . . . [W]orse . . . vouchers . . . erase [the] tradition of parents taking full responsibilities for their children's education."

SUMMARY

SPECIAL ISSUES

I. The Research on Vouchers

A. There is no significant difference in student performance between public and private schools (after factoring out family profiles).

B. Though it has been in operation for over seven years, Milwaukee's voucher program cannot be shown to be a success.

II. The Success of Public School Choice Programs

A. No evidence demonstrates that children perform better in private charter schools.

B. Public school choice programs and private school vouchers are not synonymous.

III. Voucher Programs in Urban School Systems

A. Urban vouchers divert attention from providing real solutions needed for our urban youth.

B. Urban vouchers will weaken the public schools.

C. Urban vouchers are only a stalking horse for a bigger voucher program, which will be more damaging to public schools.

IV. The Case Against Federal Vouchers

A. Federal vouchers contain the major flaws of state vouchers.

B. Title I vouchers and voucher proposals tied to school discipline and safety records won't necessarily reach the most educationally needy children and will draw both federal and state resources out of the poorest schools.

C. Mandatory vouchers to mayors as a condition for empowerment zone funding is politically and financially harmful to the education of children in urban school districts.

V. Why Conservatives Should Worry About Vouchers

A. A politically viable voucher program will mean government regulation of private schools.

B. Religious schools will have to compromise their mission.

C. Self-reliant families will become dependent on government vouchers.

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APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT VOUCHER PROJECTS

The Milwaukee Voucher Plan

Milwaukee has operated a voucher program since 1990, and over the years, the legislature has expanded the original program (including the involvement of religious schools, which has been struck down and faces further litigation).

The program was amended in 1995 opening the program to any child residing in Milwaukee whose family's income is below 125 percent of the poverty level. The program is open to all eligible public school children in grades K-12, with the maximum number of vouchers set at 7 percent of public school enrollment (or a maximum of 7,250 students). The program was then allowed to double to 15 percent (or about 15,000 students in 1996-1997). Students are selected by random lottery.

Enrollment of voucher students in any one school initially was limited to 50 percent, then to 65 percent. Now there is no limit on the portion of the student body that can include voucher students. The amount of the voucher, which is nearly $4,700 per pupil (full-time equivalent), is equal to the amount of per-pupil state aid that would have been paid to the Milwaukee school system, but not greater than the cost of educating a child at the private school.

Over the first four years, the program grew from 341 to 802 students, or about half the authorized level. During that time, the number of participating schools expanded from 6 to 12. Currently, 1,600 students are using vouchers. By comparison, Milwaukee's 130 private schools enrolled more than 24,000 students in 1995, or about 30 percent of the city's middle- and upper-income children and 7 percent of the children from the city's poorest neighborhoods.

The Cleveland Voucher Plan

Through state legislation, a voucher program was initiated in the 1996-1997 school year in Cleveland, Ohio, for 2,000 students from low-income families. The program was available to children in kindergarten through the third grade.

Parents received a voucher of $2,250 per child and paid additional tuition based on income. In the first year, more than one-fourth of the children selected by lottery to receive vouchers were already enrolled in private schools. In addition to the voucher, $500 grants were available to tutor the 4,000 children who applied for the program but were not selected in the lottery.

Overall, the program cost $5.25 million and was funded through a state grant that usually is used to provide programs for Cleveland's disadvantaged students.

A key feature of Cleveland's public voucher program was that parochial schools were made eligible. Parochial schools enroll a majority of students in the city's 48 private schools. However, in May 1997, a state appellate court held that the plan violated the separation of church and state.

Despite the court ruling, which will be reviewed by the Ohio Supreme Court, legislation was enacted in August 1997 to extend the program for two years. One thousand students would be allowed in kindergarten and third graders would be allowed to continue in fourth grade – with the voucher worth as much as $2,500.

Private Voucher Plans

Across the nation there are about 20 privately funded voucher plans. Two of the largest and most visible are in San Antonio and Indianapolis.

The San Antonio Plan. San Antonio set up a public school choice program emphasizing immersion into Latino language, culture, and history. In addition, the business community created a program to allow 2,000 poor children to attend private schools through a private scholarship program. Parents pay about one-half the tuition cost. An article in the May 1994 issue of Phi Delta Kappan says that 99 percent of the students are enrolled in sectarian schools, mainly Catholic, and 95 percent of the parents rate religious training as very important or important.

The Indianapolis Plan. In Indianapolis, a privately financed trust was established in 1991 that supports the enrollment of about 1,000 children from low-income families in 67 private schools. As in San Antonio, parents pay about one-half the tuition cost. The private schools are overwhelmingly sectarian and enroll 75 percent of the children involved in the program. Forty percent of non-Catholic parents participating in the voucher program send their children to Catholic schools.

APPENDIX B

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING VOUCHERS

American Center for Law and Justice

American Enterprise Institute

American Legislative Exchange Council

Americans for Tax Reform

Association of American Educators

Association of Christian Schools International

Cato Institute

Center for Education Reform

Christian Coalition

Council on American Private Education

Eagle Forum

Empower America

Family Foundation

Family Research Council

Free Congress Foundation

Heritage Foundation

Hudson Institute

Institute for Justice

John Locke Foundation

Landmark Legal Foundation

Of The People

The Alexis deTocqueville Institute

NOTE: The above represents a partial list of national organizations that advocate vouchers. Some are think tanks that develop public opinion messages and do political issues research, while others represent large grass roots constituent groups. The U.S. Catholic Conference supports choice in principle, but does not support all voucher proposals.

APPENDIX C

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSING VOUCHERS

American Alliance for Healthy Physical Education

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

American Association of School Administrators

American Association of University Women

American Civil Liberties Union

Americans for Democratic Action

American Federation of Teachers

American Jewish Committee

Americans for Religious Liberty

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Anti-Defamation League

ASPIRA Association, Inc.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Baptist Joint Committee

Center for Law and Education

Child Welfare League of America, Inc.

Children's Defense Fund

Council of Chief State School Officers

Council for Educational Development and Research

Council for Exceptional Children

Council of the Great City Schools

General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists

International Reading Association

Labor Council for Latin American Advancement

League of Women Voters

Mexican American Legal Defense & Education Fund

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

National Association of Bilingual Education

National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Association of Partners in Education

National Association of State Boards of Education

National Black Child Development Institute, Inc.

National Coalition of Title 1/Chapter 1 Parents

National Conference of Puerto Rican Women

National Council of Jewish Women

National Council of La Raza

National Council of Senior Citizens

National Education Association

National Organization for Women

National Parent Teacher Association

National School Boards Association

National Urban League

People for the American Way

Public Education and Religious Liberty

Public Employee Dept/AFL-CIO

Service Employees International Union AFL-CIO

Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Methodist Church

United States Student Association

APPENDIX D

DISPELLING THE MYTHS ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION

The following information will help dispel the myths that (1) American students are not achieving, (2) school dropout rates are increasing, (3) public schools are wasting money, and (4) teachers don't send their children to public school. See references for more information.

Student Achievement

A 1996 international comparison of reading achievement showed that 9-year-old students from the United States clearly outperformed students from all nations but two. American 13-year-olds performed at about the same levels as students from most other nations.

The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) found that for science performance, American eighth-graders were above the international average. For math, our eighth-graders performed below the international average, although American scores were similar to those of England and Germany.

The TIMSS data for fourth graders showed that American students were outperformed in science by only one nation, and performed favorably in mathematics in comparison to other industrialized nations.

Scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a nationwide exam sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, indicate that math and reading performance scores have improved since 1970 for 13- and 17-year-olds. Science proficiency scores have increased since 1977.

NAEP scores have dramatically increased for minority students — showing that the gap between white students and nonwhite students is narrowing. Research from the Rand Corp. suggests that this narrowing has occurred because of steadily increasing funding for federal social programs that target at-risk students.

Public school students today are taking more challenging courses in high school. The number of high school students taking math and science classes as part of the "new basics" curriculum has risen dramatically from 14 percent in 1982 to 51 percent in 1994. Additionally, the number of students taking college preparatory courses has also increased, particularly the number of minority students.

SAT scores have not declined over time, even though the population of students taking the exam has shifted dramatically. During the past several decades, greater numbers of students from the lower academic ranks of their class have begun taking the SAT exam.

School Completion Rates

High school completion rates have risen steadily since the 1970s. In 1991, 88 percent of the population of 25- to 29-year-olds had completed at least four years of high school. This is an astonishing success given that in 1950 only 34 percent of the population completed high school.

Dropout rates for African Americans, in particular, have declined substantially over the same period of time, from nearly 29 percent in 1967 to 13 percent in 1991.

College completion rates are also at an all-time high. In 1950, only 6 percent of high school graduates completed four years of college. Today, that percentage is up to 26 percent of high school graduates.

College completion rates in the United States are far higher than those in other industrialized nations. Italy, for example, has a college completion rate of only 7 percent.

In the United States, more young women successfully complete a higher education degree (23 percent) than in any other industrialized nation. (For example, corresponding percentages for Japan and Germany are 12 percent and 11 percent, respectively.)

School Expenditures

Although per-pupil expenditures have increased over the past several decades, such expenditures have led to concomitant increases in student achievement, as measured by exams such as the ACT, SAT, and the NAEP exam.

The increases in spending for public education have gone primarily towards teacher salaries and special education costs — not to support an expanding school bureaucracy.

There is no evidence that schools spend too much on administrative costs. In fact, when compared to other types of workplaces in the United States, public school systems hire far fewer supervisors.

The United States spends more than some nations on public education, and less than others. There is no evidence that we spend an exorbitant amount on education — with the possible exception of higher education — when compared to other nations.

Teachers as Customers of the Public Schools

Among public school teachers, 92 percent of all public school teacher families send some or all of their children to public schools (compared with 90 percent of the general public).

Among private school teachers, 75 percent send at least one of their children to public schools and 66 percent send all of their children to public school.

APPENDIX E

HISTORY OF STATE ACTION ON VOUCHERS AND TUITION TAX CREDITS

Table 1 *State Referenda on Vouchers or Tuition Tax Credits*

State (including Washington, D.C.)	Year	Referendum	Reject (%)
Nebraska	1970	Tuition reimbursement	Rejected 57% to 43%
Maryland	1972	Voucher program	Rejected 55% to 45%
Michigan	1978	Voucher program	Rejected 74% to 26%
Washington, D.C.	1981	Tuition tax credit	Rejected 89% to 11%
Oregon	1990	Tuition tax credit	Rejected 67% to 33%
Colorado	1992	Voucher program	Rejected 67% to 33%
California	1993	Voucher program	Rejected 70% to 30%
Washington	1996	Voucher program	Rejected 65% to 35%

Table 2 *State Legislation on Vouchers or Tuition Tax Credits*

State	Year	Legislation	Action
Illinois	1990	Voucher legislation	Defeated
Wisconsin	1990	Voucher plan for Milwaukee	Enacted, expanded in 1995, pending court decision
Puerto Rico	1993	Voucher program	Enacted, court found unconstitutional
Ohio	1995	Voucher pilot for Cleveland	Enacted, pending court decision
Washington,D.C.	1996	U.S. Congress proposed federally funded vouchers	Killed by filibuster
Washington, D.C.	1997	U.S. Congress proposed federally funded vouchers	Pending

Source: American Association of School Administrators, Private School Vouchers: *What Are the Real Choices?*

APPENDIX F

PROFILE OF PRIVATE EDUCATION

Twenty-five percent of all schools in the United States are private — about 26,000 schools total, down from a total of 26,700 in 1989-1990. Most private schools are located on the East and West coasts.

Only 11 percent of all students were enrolled in private schools in 1993-1994, as compared to nearly 16 percent in 1964. Of these students, 51 percent were enrolled in Catholic schools during the 1993-1994 academic year.

- Although Catholic schools account for almost 35 percent of the total population of private schools, the category showing the most dramatic growth in recent years is that of the conservative Christian fundamentalist academies. Among religious schools, the specific breakdown in 1993-1994 was 32 percent Catholic, 9.3 percent Christian (unspecified), and 4 percent Seventh Day Adventist. The "other" category of religious schools accounts for nearly 6 percent of all schools.

- According to researcher Peter W. Cookson Jr., enrollment in Catholic schools fell 46 percent from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. However, because of successful recruitment efforts, Catholic school enrollment has risen over the past five years. Most of the enrollment increases for Catholic schools have been in suburban areas.

- The vast majority of private schools serve children in grades K-8 — which are far less costly to operate than high schools.

- Private schools tend to be smaller than public schools.

- Private schools are funded by a combination of tuition payments, institutional support (such as the support of a sponsoring church), and public money in the form of services provided through state and local programs.

- Public and private school teachers work about the same number of hours each week. However, private school teachers are paid less and receive fewer benefits than their public school counterparts. Private school teachers also have lower levels of education than public school teachers and are less likely to be certified.

- Studies comparing public and private school students on achievement tests often show that private school students perform better. However, these studies typically do not control for family income. When family income is taken into account, these differences disappear.

- Private school students are less likely to drop out of school and are more likely to attend college when compared to public school students. However, private high schools self-select on the basis of admissions exams and courses of instruction that target college bound students. Only one-third of students who attend Catholic schools at the elementary grades attend Catholic high school. The remainder primarily enroll in public schools.

- Crime and violence are reported to be lower at private schools. However, private schools are also more likely to be small, and small schools in general have fewer discipline problems. They also are less likely to report or publicize minor discipline problems.

- The general public believes that private schools are better academically (in spite of the research indicating that private schools have higher-income students and that this is what accounts for the higher academic achievement) and are safer than public schools. Parents polled share these beliefs, although to a lesser extent than the general public.

- In 1990-1991, 24 percent of private schools used admissions exams, although admissions exams are far more likely to be used at the secondary school level than at the elementary school level. Another 18 percent used a standardized achievement test as part of their admissions requirements.

- Fifty-two percent of all private schools in 1993-1994 had less than 9 percent minority students; 75 percent had less than 30 percent minority enrollment.

- Seventy-five percent of private school teachers send at least one of their children to public schools, and 67 percent send all of their children to public schools.

APPENDIX G

STATUS OF LITIGATION ON VOUCHERS AND RELATED ISSUES

Overview

In early 1997, the following cases challenging the use of vouchers for church-related schools were pending in state courts:

Cleveland. In *Simmons-Harris v. Goff* the Ohio Court of Appeals for the 10th District held on May 1, 1997, that the Cleveland voucher program violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The case is expected to be reviewed by the Ohio Supreme Court.

Milwaukee. In *Jackson v. Benson,* a lower court on January 15, 1997, struck down legislation that extended vouchers to religious schools. Subsequently, the Wisconsin Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court decision on the grounds that the inclusion of religious schools violates the state constitution. The case is on appeal to the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

Vermont. In *Chittenden Town School District v. Vermont State Board of Education,* a township decision to use vouchers to send students to a religious school caused the state board to threaten to withhold state funding. The town filed suit against the state to force payment. On June 27, 1997, a superior court ruled that this use of vouchers would violate the U.S. and Vermont constitutions.

Analysis

One of these cases may reach the U.S. Supreme Court. However, it is unclear what the court will do. Indeed, the court may choose not to accept any of these cases. The following paragraphs review the status of U.S. constitutional law in this area.

Status of Litigation

The first amendment of the U.S. Constitution states in part that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. There is a long line of U.S. Supreme Court cases interpreting the establishment clause as it relates to education in church-related schools.

In *Everson v. the Board of Education* in 1947 the court said :

> The "establishment of religion" clause of the First amendment means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or non-attendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt

to teach or practice religion. Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa. In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect a "a wall of separation between Church and State."

Yet, this case also upheld a state law that authorized the reimbursement of transportation expenses to parents of children attending parochial school. Since then, the court has ruled on key establishment clause cases as follows:

1. *Board of Education v. Allen* upheld the constitutionality of a New York law that required local schools to lend textbooks to parochial school students. (1968)

2. *Lemon v. Kurtzman* struck down a Rhode Island statute providing salary supplements to teachers in religious schools, even though it was for the teaching of secular subjects. It also struck down reimbursements to those schools for salaries and instructional materials. (1971)

3. *Sloan v. Lemon* struck down a Pennsylvania statute that provided reimbursement to parents for tuition payments made by parents for students in religious schools. (1973)

4. *Meek v. Pittenger* struck down the school district efforts to loan materials and equipment to religious schools, but upheld lending textbooks without charge to children attending those schools. (1975)

5. *Grand Rapids v. Ball* struck down school district payments to private school teachers to teach on the premises of private schools, as well as sending public school teachers into private schools to teach supplemental courses. (1985)

6. *Mueller v. Allen* upheld a Minnesota statute that allowed deductions from state income tax for education expenses incurred by parents of elementary and secondary school students to deduct their children's education expenses from state income tax, including expenses for education in religious schools. (1983)

7. *Bowen v. Kendrick* upheld the constitutionality of the Adolescent Family Life Act, which provided grants to organizations, including religious organizations, to provide adolescent counseling on family life. The act specifically calls for the involvement of religious organizations in the program. (1988)

8 *Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District* upheld providing an interpreter to a deaf student in a religious school. This kind of assistance was provided to both public and private school students and was totally secular in nature. (1993)

9. *Board of Education of Kiryas Joel v. Grumet* struck down the creation of a separate school district for a municipality comprised of a single religious group. (1994)

There is no clear line as to what is constitutional and what is unconstitutional, partly because the court has changed its philosophy over the years. Indeed, in recent cases, Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Justice Antonin Scalia, and Justice Clarence Thomas seemed to be saying that the establishment clause only forbids government from establishing a religion or coercing a religious belief or practice.

Another example of this change involves the 1985 decision in *Aguilar v. Felton* where the court struck down the practice of a public school system sending public school teachers into religious schools even though the purpose was limited to providing remedial services under the federal Title I Program. In *Kiryas Joel* (1994) five justices indicated that the *Aguilar* decision should be

revisited. On January 17, 1997, the court agreed to reconsider its position. In its opinion in *Agostini v. Felton*, the Supreme Court overturned its 1985 ruling in *Aguilar*. The court ruled by a 5-4 vote that public school employees may provide Title I services in religious schools without violating the Constitution. The court said the government aid "is provided to students at whatever school they choose to attend." While this language has encouraged voucher supporters, it must be balanced by other cautionary statements by the court that have encouraged opponents, noting that the Title I aid upheld in *Agostini* is supplemental to regular parochial school education and no government funds ever reach the treasuries of religious schools.

From these cases, it can be concluded that aid provided to religious institutions and/or employees of religious institutions is likely to be held unconstitutional. However, if the aid is to parents through a statute that treats parents of public school children and nonpublic school children identically, these cases suggest such assistance meets the constitutional test.

For example, tax credits available to everyone appear to pass constitutional muster. What is unclear is how the court would react to a voucher system. Is it akin to *Sloan v. Lemon*, or is it more like *Zobrest* and *Agostini*?

Source: Office of General Counsel, NSBA

APPENDIX H

SAMPLE GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

CALIFORNIA STATEWIDE INITIATIVE

PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

COLORADO STATEWIDE INITIATIVE

California State Initiative

Local Coalitions

The County coalition should ensure that local coalitions within the county are established and operating as needed. While some counties can conduct a campaign against the voucher effectively with only a county coalition, most of the more populated counties will need a number of local, community-based coalitions.

Membership on the local coalitions should be as diverse as possible, and should include representatives from the core members of the Committee to Educate Against Vouchers (CEAV).

Coalition Activities

Campaign activities can be divided into two main efforts: the internal campaign and the external campaign. The internal campaign is the effort coalitions will undertake to ensure that all of the members of the education community – board members, administrators, teachers, classified staff, and parents – are educated about the Voucher Initiative, are registered to vote, and do, in fact, vote in the November 2 election.

The external campaign includes all the efforts to broaden the coalition against the Voucher Initiative, to educate diverse groups outside of the education community about the effects of the initiative, and to ensure that those who are against the initiative vote in the November 2 election.

County and local coalitions should ensure that they are organized to perform the following activities.

- Organize a local **media watch** to monitor every local report or commentary on vouchers and transmit accurate accounts of this back to the CEAV headquarters.
- Create a local **opposition watch** to monitor the activities and statements of area voucher proponents, collect materials produced by proponents, and transmit this information to the CEAV headquarters.
- Recruit articulate and diverse spokespersons who can function as a **speakers bureau** to make the case against voucher before local audiences.
- Organize and perform **voter registration** efforts and develop plans for get-out-the-vote efforts.

- Recruit and train **volunteers** to implement the campaign's voter contact program.
- Stay in touch with local coalitions within the county and serve as a **connection** between the local coalitions and the statewide campaign.
- Stay in touch with the statewide campaign to provide information on local activities.

Pennsylvania Grassroots Campaign

Action Required

1. **Identify coordinators in targeted districts.** Coordinator-teams must be set up in each targeted district. These teams will coordinate local activities and recruit volunteers to form a "truth squad" – as needed – and to "ride" the anti-voucher bus when it tours their district. Put simply, the volunteers identified by the Coalition will BE the grassroots – voicing concerns about vouchers at hearings, on radio talk shows and at public meetings. And, in cooperation with the volunteers identified by the Coalition, the Coordinator-teams will coordinate the STOP THE VOUCHER TAX GRAB media events in their area in June.
2. **Equip and train the local coordinators.** We suggest a meeting in Harrisburg by the end of May. The coordinators will be given information about the campaign and their roles in it. They will be provided with:
   - A how-to manual, complete with the campaign plan, planned tour stops, a timeline and resource phone numbers.
   - Talking points for themselves and/or volunteers they recruit.
   - Draft letters-to-the-editor for local distribution in cooperation with volunteers identified by the Coalition.
   - Media interview tip sheets.
   - Literature, including self-mailer cards to legislators.
3. **Distribute materials.**
   - OpEd pieces for daily newspapers.
   - Church bulletin insert distributed by Pennsylvania Council of Churches and synagogues.
   - Other materials distributed as appropriate by Coalition partners to their members.
   - We suggest the Coalition establish and operate a FAX/phone tree so that member groups can keep their members up-to-date on voucher/anti-voucher activities.
4. **Stay in touch.**
   Weekly conference calls will keep local coordinators up to speed on tour planning and facilitate problem resolution. FAX/mailings as appropriate.
5. **Plan tour.**
Stops of the STOP THE VOUCHER TAX GRAB bus will be fine-tuned according to targets developed by the Coalition.
6. **Identify bus staff**
In addition to the driver, the Coalition will need to provide AT LEAST two additional people for the duration of the tour – more would be better. They will need to hang the poster at tour stops, and set up A/V equipment for news conferences. Also, assuming hecklers from the other side may wish to attend our events as well, the more bodies the merrier in terms of drowning out the other side's message and underscoring our own.

Additionally, a member of the statewide Coalition should be on the bus at each stop to speak, to introduce local speakers (ideally, a cross-section of local members of the coalition) and to tell the media about the Coalition and the purpose of the tour. The same statewide Coalition spokesperson need not be on every leg of the bus tour but a spokesperson should commit to full days for scheduling efficiency.

An additional one or two people will need to advance the bus stop, leapfrogging by car on to the nest stop, or to a news or radio station, after the bus arrives for the news conference.

7. **Launch the statewide "STOP THE VOUCHER TAX GRAB" tour.**

We suggest three news conferences per tour day in targeted communities, with radio/TV interviews, studio interviews or phoners arranged to fit into the schedule. In the evening, after news cycles, the bus should be taken to a mall or to a sporting event where people can sign the poster and receive literature.

8. **Support tour with daily releases/radio feeds.**

9. **Conclude the tour with a rally/petition delivery at the Capitol.**

Colorado State Initiative

Spread the word:
Seven Against 7

Amendment 7 (Vouchers) is a bad policy and bad education policy. Amendment 7 does nothing to improve neighborhood public schools, while undermining the American tradition of public education. Amendment 7 reduces public school funding by at least $84 million and gives that money to those who can afford to send their children to private schools.

We must defeat Amendment 7. We must spread word about the effects it will have on public education. With a small investment of your time and money, you can turn your one vote against Amendment 7 into 50 votes. Here's how.

Seven steps you can take to defeat Amendment 7:

1. Make seven copies of this flyer (10 cents a copy at the supermarket).
2. Talk to seven friends about Amendment 7. Give each a copy of this flyer.
3. Get each friend's commitment to vote NO on 7.
4. Ask each friend to help spread the word by making seven copies of the flyer and talking to seven friends.
5. Keep a list of who you gave your flyers to.
6. At the end of October, call your seven friends. Remind them to vote NO on Amendment 7 (vouchers) and to call their seven friends to remind them.
7. Vote, and pat yourself on the back for generating 50 votes against Amendment 7.

Seven reasons to vote against Amendment 7:

1. Amendment 7 is a direct subsidy to the wealthy who send their children to private schools.
2. Amendment 7 diverts tax dollars to private, religious, and home schools that set their own admission standards and can exclude students for whatever reason.
3. Amendment 7 will either increase taxes or decrease funding for public schools. It might even do both.
4. Amendment 7 excludes private, religious, and home schools from any accountability for the use of tax dollars.
5. Amendment 7 raises questions about the issue of separation of church and state.
6. Amendment 7 is an amendment to the state constitution and cannot be changed by the legislature if it doesn't work.
7. Amendment 7 is so poorly written that even the proponents can't agree on what it really means.

Vote NO on Amendment 7 — Vouchers

APPENDIX I

SAMPLE MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT AND MEDIA

Pennsylvania: Notes on Message Development

1995 Legislative Campaign

Four principles of message shaping:

1. **Clutter.** People receive 1,300 pieces of new information each day. Our coalition's three-ring binder was good, but now it's time to put it away. It's simply too much information. The danger for our coalition: If we can't start pulling in our own directions, and sending our own messages, we lose. It's also a danger for the administration and the voucher proponents, too. We already see it in their conflicting messages.
2. **Salience:** What does this issue mean to you? The opposition's most salient point: You should be able to choose what's best for your kid. Ours: the cost of vouchers.
3. **Simplicity:** We must reduce our message to its most basic expression.
4. **Repetition:** We must say our most basic message over and over again. Don't change the message after a short time!

Message: We send it, they receive it. What's the problem?

Pitfalls: If we are defensive, our message is complex. If we have no comment, we create a vacuum in the media. Another pitfall is the "silver bullet approach"—the idea that one strategy of delivering the message or delivering it one time without repetition will accomplish our goals. If they show up where we aren't, they beat us.

In message shaping, we are often our own worst enemy by going off the message and giving ammunition to our opponents.

Negatives: Arguments for Vouchers Include:

Competition is good; the public schools are failing; the public schools are not safe; parents deserve a choice; the costs of public schools are going up while achievement declines; poor test scores; double taxation; we need more options for our kids; parents know best; private schools perform better than public schools; public schools don't teach values, Catholic schools should be preserved; Catholic schools are more efficient; public schools waste money.

Words our coalition should avoid using: choice, pilot, education establishment.

The Bannon poll reveals that Pennsylvania public schools' negatives are twice as high as private and religious schools.

The poll data also show that a pilot program is more favorable with the public.

Words make a difference: Don't call them vouchers. Call them "state tax money in the form of vouchers" or "a costly new government program."

Vouchers are "tickets to nowhere." There is no guarantee your kid can get in.

Vouchers are "rebates for the rich." This language may not be as effective if voucher amounts are scaled to income levels (poor get larger amount).

No matter what is in the voucher legislation, our response is that this is a "Trojan horse" or "a new package with new gift wrap, but still the same thing inside." More effective language for our coalition:

- The large print giveth and small print taketh away when it comes to vouchers.
- The only competition will be how big the tax increases are.
- State tax dollars in form of vouchers.
- Private schools not subject to state regulations (less control of your tax dollars).
- There are things we can do to improve public education now: The Bannon poll and Mansfield poll show the public wants computers in classrooms; alternative education programs for violent and disruptive youth; high academic standards; and more parental involvement.
- It would be foolish to spend state tax dollars on vouchers when we can't fund public schools now.
- Ticket to nowhere — no room at the inn.
- Vouchers are too expensive (but don't use specific numbers).
- Pilot programs are a "foot in the door." Have you ever seen a government program discontinued once established?
- Hold harmless and no tax increase promises: Do you remember a President who said read my lips? The best intentions of governors and lawmakers not withstanding, this is a prescription for tax increases.
- Everyone's first choice is a good neighborhood school.
- Private schools already receive state tax benefits: $175 million goes to private schools now.

Show the tax impact of vouchers if 1 percent and 5 percent of students transfer.

The argument that vouchers are unconstitutional doesn't fly with the public.

Washington Message Tactics*

Following are a couple of tactics for using and staying on our message.

Message Squares

Message squares are a valuable tool to remind us of how to stay on message when we talk to people. We want to spend our time in the A square. When discussion of I-173/I-177 is framed in terms found in OUR message square (A), we are reaching people. When the discussion is framed in terms of THEIR square (B), we are losing people.

We want people to vote NO on I-173 and I-177 because (we say):

A. Our Message

1. These initiatives are public money going to private schools.
2. There is no accountability with these initiatives—it's our money, their rules. Elected school boards have no say in Taber/Spady Schools.
3. There are no standards. Taber schools can be started by extremist groups with taxpayer money and the teachers don't even need a college degree. Under both Taber and Spady schools, students are not required to meet basic achievement standards.
4. There are radical proposals that would create a chaotic, crazy-quilt pattern of public schools and privately run schools competing for taxpayer dollars.

Taber/Spady want people to vote YES on I-173/I-177 because they say:

B. Their Message

1. We need reform; the schools are broken.
2. Public schools are a government monopoly.
3. We need to give parents a choice.
4. It won't cost the taxpayers.

It is very hard and it does take discipline to stay within our own square; sometimes the desire to step up and fight is hard to resist. But fighting often means that we are spending too much time in THEIR square (B). It is crucial to the success of our campaign that we all try to keep our dialogue focused on the messages in OUR own square (A). Sometimes we have to acknowledge charges or claims made by the opposition, but we need to do so quickly, pivot, and get right back to our square.

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*Taber-Spady relate to the sponsors of Washington's two proposals.

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APPENDIX J

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR/ OP-EDS/EDITORIALS

- Message Points
- Brochure
- Radio Ads
- Ad Sheet
- Letters-to-the-Editor
- Sample Op-Eds

Five Good Reasons to Oppose the Voucher Initiative

1. Devastates Neighborhood Schools' Budgets—May Lead to Tax Increases

2. No Oversight—No Accountability

3. Legally Sanctions Discrimination

4. Transfers Money from the Needy to the Wealthy

5. Abandons Public School Kids

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The following is copy taken from a three-panel brochure used by California's Committee to Educate Against Vouchers.

The School Voucher Initiative on California's November ballot offers a textbook example of greed. It would wreak havoc on our neighborhood schools and the taxpayers who fund them.

The Voucher Initiative

- Would allow any individual or group that attracts 25 students to receive taxpayer-funded vouchers;
- Would not require voucher school teachers to have a college degree or teaching credential;
- Would take 10 percent of neighborhood school budgets and give the money to private voucher schools without holding them accountable for how the money is spent;
- Would subsidize wealthy children's private education at the expense of taxpayers and hurt the very children who need help the most;
- May lead to a $2.6 billion tax increase to pay for the budget cuts in neighborhood schools;
- Would allow private voucher schools to discriminate against potential students they deem undesirable.

The voucher initiative threatens our neighborhood schools and our children's future. California voters will decide their fate when they vote November 2.

Voucher Schools Answer to No One

Under the initiative, billions of taxpayer dollars would flow into private voucher schools with no oversight on how the money is spent.

Anyone could open a voucher school simply by recruiting 25 students.

It sounds incredible, but it's true. Twenty-five students and you'd have yourself a "school" eligible for taxpayer money. With no course or testing requirements for reading, math, science, history and other core subjects.

Voucher schools could hire anyone they want — voucher teachers wouldn't have to be credentialed or even possess a college degree. And they could teach almost anything they wished.

Theft disguised as "reform."

Remarkably, promoters sell the voucher initiative as "reform." They claim it will save taxpayers money and improve California's education system.

Let's set the record straight. This initiative:

- Would rob neighborhood schools of 10 percent of their budget—even if not one additional child leaves the public schools—and give that money to unaccountable voucher schools;
- Would take away funding for two students (about $10,400) every time one transfers to a private voucher school;
- While robbing neighborhood schools, the initiative would do nothing to improve discipline or teacher quality, reduce class size, or supply children with textbooks and other resources they need.

Takes from Local Schools to Pay for Voucher Schools

Currently, the parents of 500,000 children have chosen to enroll their children in private and religious schools rather than public schools.

Voucher schools would receive $2,600 for every child now in a private school who requests one. The initiative requires this money to be taken from the budget of neighborhood schools in your community. That's more than $1.3 billion that would be lifted from neighborhood school budgets and handed over to voucher schools for a total loss of 10 percent from the local schools' budget.

Those who favor the voucher initiative like to talk about "choice." The real choice forced on taxpayers by the initiative would be whether to replace lost funds with new taxes, or accept more crowded classes, fewer textbooks and classroom supplies.

A Vote for Discrimination

The initiative would allow private voucher schools to deny enrollment to students based on religion, gender, income, and other factors. That means voucher schools bankrolled by taxpayer money could decide to open their doors to boys only, or, girls only; or refuse a child they say is not "bright enough" or whose family doesn't agree with the school's extremist view; or who may have special needs; and so on.

Vote NO on Vouchers

California's taxpayers and our children deserve better. In the November 2 Special Election, show our kids you care by voting NO on the Voucher Initiative.

For more information, contact:

Committee to Educate Against Vouchers
18401 Von Karman Ave., Suite 120
Irvine, CA 92715 (714) 222-5485

Don't give up on California's kids

Pennsylvania: Radio Ad

SFX: Phone rings and is answered.

ANSWERING MACHINE (woman's voice): You've reached the Fullers. At the beep, please leave a message ... (BEEP)

GRANDMA: Betty? This is Mom. I've been looking into this voucher thing ... for my little granddaughters. Oh, dear ... it looks like it's just *another* empty political promise.

It hasn't worked anywhere they've tried it ... it's been voted down in every state where they put it on the ballot ...

And, Dad! He says tuition vouchers will lead to a tax increase, and you know we can't afford that!

Oh, and Phil, you know, our neighbor, the accountant? He says they've got tens of millions of dollars they're hoarding in Harrisburg in hopes of doing this voucher deal? He says that money could buy enough computers so every classroom in the state could have them. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Laura and Christine had computers in their classrooms?

Well, call and we'll really talk ... Hugs and kisses to the girls. And Fred. (click)
ANNCR: State tax dollars for private school tuition vouchers. A risk we can't afford. This message sponsored by the Public Education Coalition to Oppose Tuition Vouchers. Call 1-800-987-RISK for information.

ALTERNATE TAG: State tax dollars for private school tuition vouchers. A risk we can't afford. Call your state legislators now to say "no" to tuition vouchers. Sponsored by the Public Education Coalition to Oppose Tuition Vouchers.

Pennsylvania Radio Ad

SFX: Street sounds, pigeons, kids in playground ... under dialogue.

LARRY: Hey, Mort! Where you been? Visiting your daughter Betty again?

MORT: Yeah. Move over on that bench. I love those grandchildren. They're so smart!

LARRY: If we get school vouchers, is Betty gonna send 'em to private school?

MORT: What vouchers? You kidding? When you gonna learn to recognize another political hoax? What they're promising is just another new government program when we can't get enough money to run our public schools right now!

I went with Betty to buy a computer for my grandson. We want what's best, right? But do they have computers in his school? No, they say they can't afford 'em.

So they want to use state tax dollars for vouchers? Why? It'll just go to a select few AND it's going to cost the rest of us a bushel in new taxes!

LARRY: Uh oh. You said the "T" word, Mort. If it's going to cost me more for vouchers, help our public schools instead. That'll help everybody.

MORT: Now you're talking sense, Larry. Dollars and sense.

ANNCR: State tax dollars for private school tuition vouchers. A risk we can't afford. This message sponsored by the Public Education Coalition to Oppose Tuition Vouchers. If you want to learn more, call 1-800-987-RISK.

ALTERNATE TAG: State tax dollars for private school tuition vouchers. A risk we can't afford. Call your state legislatures now to say "no" to tuition vouchers. Sponsored by the Public Education Coalition to Oppose Tuition Vouchers.

No on 173 & 177

Why Washington voters should reject the "170s"

The "170s," or "Taber-Spady" plans, would force taxpayers to spend millions of dollars on privately-run schools, with no accountability for the money and no standards of achievement for the students.

What are the 170s?
The 170s are initiatives 173 and 177, two disastrous, ill-conceived schemes on the November statewide ballot that would disrupt and potentially dismantle our children's public education. *And they'd do it using your tax dollars.* Initiative 173 is bankrolled by Dr. Ron Taber. Initiative 177 is sponsored by Fawn and Jim Spady. Both initiatives say most anyone could start a privately-run school and require that you pay for it.

The 170s mean public money for privately-run schools.
The Taber-Spady schemes would force taxpayers to fund privately-run schools—schools with no accountability for how your money is spent, and no standards for how our children are taught. All taxpayers would be forced to pay for Taber-Spady schools, but the so-called schools can pick, choose and reject kids they don't want. Taber-Spady schools could take our money and lock out our kids. *That's just wrong.*

No accountability: the 170s mean our money; their rules.
The local school boards we elect—school boards that answer to us taxpayers—would have no say under the Taber-Spady schemes. Virtually any organization, group or special interest can take our tax dollars and start a so-called school without telling anyone how the money is being spent.

No standards for school management or student achievement.
Taber Schools can be started by extremist groups with taxpayer money and the teachers don't even need college degrees. Under both Taber and Spady Schools, students are not required to meet basic achievement standards, and the schools are exempted from meeting the health and safety standards we expect from public schools. *That makes no sense.*

What urges you to reject the Taber-Spady schemes?
A broad and diverse coalition of Washingtonians oppose the 170s, including the PTA and the League of Women Voters, as well as parents, teachers, business leaders and educators. And the list is growing every day.

Join the coalition against the 170s today.

Call the campaign at (206) 720-6216 for more information.

Paid for by the No on 173/177 Committee. 1530 Eastlake Ave. E., Seattle, WA 98102

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Pennsylvania: Letters-to-the-Editor on Costs

Stop the Voucher Grab, Suggested Letter No. 1

Your Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Date

Newspaper Name
c/o Letters to Editor
Address
City, State, Zip

I find it interesting, and somewhat insulting, that tuition voucher supporters describe their school voucher with words like "choice" and "competition." As I see it, the words "tax" and "grab" more accurately describe this plan.

In Pennsylvania, we already pay taxes at the state and local level to support the public schools in our communities.

Now voucher seekers want to devote even more state tax dollars—about $40 million more this year and about $250 million in additional funds in the fifth year—to encourage parents to send their children to other schools. And the hit on the local tax system will be even more dramatic.

Here in (NAME) Schoool District, assuming one percent of our students transferred to a private school or another school district, the voucher plan would cost local taxpayers (AMOUNT). If five percent of the students left, the cost to the district would be (AMOUNT). And since the school district has fixed costs like heating, maintenance and salaries, that shortfall must be made up somewhere, and the hit will be in local taxes.

Yes, we need to improve our schools. But the way to do that is to demand accountability through our locally elected school board members, and not by throwing away more tax dollars on another big government program dreamed up in Harrisburg.

Sincerely,

(NAME)
(include daytime and home phone numbers)

Stop the Voucher Grab, Suggested Letter No. 2

Your Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Date

Newspaper Name
c/o Letters to Editor
Address
City, State, Zip

Editor:

I am a Catholic parent who chose to send my children to a parochial school. And—surprise! I am against this new school voucher proposal.

Like anyone else trying to make ends meet, I would love to have financial assistance in paying the tuition bills. But like the old saying goes, everything has a price.

I am concerned that if my school is supported by tax dollars, either state regulators or the courts will begin dictating what my kids can or cannot be taught. If I wanted to give up that kind of control over the environment in which my kids learn, I would have enrolled my children in public schools to begin with, at a substantial savings to our family budget.

Thanks, but no thanks.

Sincerely,

(NAME)
(include daytime and home phone numbers)

Stop the Voucher Grab, Suggested Letter No. 3.

Your Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Date

Newspaper Name
c/o Letters to Editor
Address
City, State, Zip

Editor:

In all the debate in Harrisburg over the private school tuition voucher proposal, I haven't heard much talk about the hidden costs of this new government program.

School vouchers would cost almost $40 million in state taxes this year, and up to $350 million in the fifth year of the program.

And under the proposed plan, if a child chooses to go to another public school, the subsidy paid to the old school follows the child. In other words, school districts that lose a student under the voucher plan will also lose the subsidy (median about $2,800 per pupil) the state paid to support that child's education. Beyond that, the losing school district will also have to pay to transport that child from his or her home district to the new school.

Unless a very large number of their students leave for another public or private school (which is unlikely, in my view), the losing school districts could not make up the shortfall by firing teachers, reducing support staff or eliminating classes. Every school has fixed costs (heat, light, maintenance), no matter how many pupils sit in a classroom.

With the voucher plan, schools will more than likely still have enough children to warrant current class and staff levels—just not enough state support to pay for them. With reduced dollars available from the state, there would be an upward pressure on local property taxes to cover the shortfall.

Even so-called "winning" school districts could lose if a student's voucher and the subsidy from the previous school do not equal the cost to educate that child. The winning school district would have to absorb at least a portion of that cost—again putting pressure on the local tax base.

The hidden costs of vouchers should cause everyone to take a second look.

Sincerely,

(NAME)
(include daytime and home phone numbers)

Stop the Voucher Grab, Suggested Letter No. 4

Your Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Date

Newspaper Name
c/o Letters to Editor
Address
City, State, Zip

Editor:

All taxpayers want their legislators and senators to be very careful with public money. Their vote on the private tuition voucher plan being talked about in Harrisburg will tell us how careful they are.

Vouchers will cost up to $350 million a year in state tax dollars, and who knows how many dollars in local property taxes. All that's on top of the $5 billion the state already pays for education.

And we're not even sure if vouchers will work. If no child changes schools as a result of this plan, vouchers will still cost hundreds of millions of dollars to help pay the tuitions of families who already send their kids to private or parochial schools.

If the state has extra money, forget vouchers. Invest in the public schools we already have.

Sincerely,

(NAME)
(include daytime and home phone numbers)

Guidelines for Writing Letters to the Editor

1. Know the rules. Each newspaper has its own rules for letters intended for publication. All require that letters be signed. Most ask you to include the writer's address and telephone number—not for publication, but to verify that you actually wrote the letter. Some have limitations on the number of words per letter. Newspapers print the rules from time to time in their "Letters to the Editor" column. Call the editor if in doubt.

2. Stick to one point. Trying to cover an array of issues usually doesn't do justice to any of them.

3. Simple declarative sentences are more effective than complex ones. (Example: "At Taber Schools, teachers are not required to hold certificates, or even college degrees.") Churchill said mastering the simple declarative sentence was his greatest accomplishment in school.

4. Sometimes the very best letter to the editor is only one paragraph in length. Brevity is the soul of wit. It often is the heart of readability.

5. Try to discuss the issue in terms of how it affects students. ("Taber-Spady Schools have no set academic standards for students.")

6. Don't be reluctant to express your convictions. At the same time, don't be unnecessarily harsh, cynical or disrespectful.

7. The experts say a letter to the editor often wins the hearts of readers with humor, solid logic, a picturesque outlook or a unique manner of approaching an issue. Specific "real people" examples are good.

8. Try to "connect" with readers. That is, write your letter as if you are saying "I Want what YOU want." A letter that appears self-serving usually suffers loss of credibility.

9. You may want to include a motivational line or "call to action" statement in your letter, such as "Please let your friends and neighbors know that you want our tax dollars to go to school districts that are locally controlled by parents and taxpayers, open for all children."

10. An upbeat letter may be more persuasive than one that scolds, blames or complains. If you criticize, be constructive in your criticism.

11. Remember, it's fair for the editor to cut part of your letter. That editor wants people to READ the Letters to the Editor column. If the editor believes that editing will improve the readability of your letter, that person will do it. So don't call to complain if something is left out. To avoid being edited, keep your letters short and to the point.

12. ***Always*** check a dictionary for spelling. Better yet, ask a friend to proofread it for you.

Say 'no' to destructive initiatives 173, 177

Over the next three weeks, you'll hear the term "school choice" bandied about like it's the fat-free ice cream at a Weight Watchers convention.

Read the fine print and remember that old adage that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Neither Initiative 177 nor Initiative 173, the charter-school and school-voucher proposals respectively, are the great elixir for all that ails public education. Far from it. They're two destructive propositions that would harm public education in this state for years.

The voucher proposal, I-173

Adding to the confusion this year is another initiative, I-173, again based on heavy recitation of the mantra of school choice. I-173 allows parents to use state-funded vouchers at private schools.

As currently drafted, the vouchers could only be used at nonsectarian schools. But the eccentric sponsor of the initiative, Ron Taber, who is spending nearly $1 million on his bid for state superintendent of public instruction and I-173, indicates he would bankroll a court challenge to assure vouchers can also be used at religious schools.

I-173 would drain the state budget and harm children left behind in public schools. It is, in a word, insidious.

Though the ads will tout school choice and parents' rights, this is an overt attempt to throw public schools into chaos. The public pays for these schools—and then what? — hopes the kids get an education. There is no accountability.

If voters don't pay serious attention, they'll find that Taber is attempting to propel Washington into unknown territory. No other state has a statewide voucher program. A couple of cities, Milwaukee, for example, use vouchers as a scholarship at private schools for poor children. That's entirely different.

Entertainer and common-sense thinker Garrison Keillor ruminated about school choice and vouchers among other things, in a recent *New York Times Magazine* piece. In his typical, humorous way, he talked about the allure of oddly named, but ultimately un-American schools.

What would they be called, he wondered: "Our Lady of Sorrows, Foursquare Millennial Gospel, Moon Goddess, Malcolm X, the Open School of Whatever, the Academy of Hairy Legged Individualism. . .

"And who could argue with the idea of free choice?" Keillor asked, "until you stop and think about the old idea of a public school, a place where you went to find out who inhabits this society other than people like you."

Vote no on I-177 and I-173, two unworthy proposals that would undermine public education in this state for a very long time.

Seattle Times editorial writers are Ross Anderson, Joni Balter, Mindy Cameron, Lance Dickie, Michelle Malkin, Terry Tang and James Veseg. Other members of the editorial board are Frank A. Blethen, William K. Blethen, Robert C. Blethen, Chris Britt and Carolyn S. Kelley.

Sample Op-Ed

Richard M. Oldrieve

Fooling Ourselves About Vouchers

As a Cleveland teacher who is extremely grateful that our short-term problems were solved when our recent contract negotiations were sealed without a strike, I was reminded that our long-term problems are getting worse by the recent *Post* article about Ohio's experiment with giving 2,000 Cleveland children vouchers [front page, Sept. 10].

Ever since Milton Friedman championed vouchers in the late 1950s, economists have waxed eloquent about the advantages that a competitive marketplace would bring to the educational community. What economists and business academics always fail to mention is the universally acknowledged downside to the competitive marketplace: Four out of five small business go bankrupt in their first five years of operation.

In the business world, when a failed business goes belly-up, the owner declares bankruptcy and finds another job to earn money to pay off the debts. In a world of vouchers, the students from the four out of five new private schools that are destined to fold will lose valuable years of early development and must be re-enrolled in the remaining public schools. So even if we as a nation decide to help a few talented students to escape our flawed urban schools through vouchers, we still must have a public school district to take in the free-market refugees. Voucher advocates may concede my point, but then they will inevitably argue that the whole point of voucher schools is to find out what ideas work best, and then franchise them to the public schools. The flaw in this logic is that when academics study the successful one out of five businesses, they invariably find an energetic entrepreneur with a vision, who is able to recruit talented employees.

Similarly, if you study a successful magnet school in an urban school district, you will invariably find an energetic principal with a vision, who recruits talented teachers from other schools in the district. Unfortunately, although only one in five businesses survive, even fewer are successfully franchised, because the original entrepreneur usually designs his or her outlet around his or her own creative and recruiting talent. A successful franchise like McDonald's needs to be designed to work with average managers who recruit average employees.

So before marketplace economists and politicians get the chance to run to their one in five successful voucher schools for a photo-op, I suggest that teachers, administrators, university education professors, business leaders, reasonable politicians and the voting public re-focus their energies to develop educational reforms that are designed to work with average principals, average teachers, students from impoverished backgrounds and parents who, for whatever reason, won't or can't enroll their children into a magnet, charter or voucher school.

We must stop arguing about ivory tower propositions that are designed to win a few university professors tenure and a few politicians election.

We must stop the illusory debates that fool a few urban parents into believing a $2,000 scholarship will allow them to enroll their children in an elite prep school, when in many instances it won't even pay tuition at such a school for the month of September.

We must stop pretending that private schools are cheaper for any reason other than lower teacher salaries, when in Ohio the state pays private school transportation and special education costs, and the sponsoring church pays the financial administration and building maintenance costs.

We must stop pretending that private schools are "better," when almost every study that matches and tracks children from similar socio-economic background finds that private and public schools yield identical results.

Yes, there are huge problems with urban education, but solutions won't be found by ignoring the problems of the marketplace. In order for our current generation of students to succeed, we must get away from designing systems that work only with the best of the best, and start designing schools that will succeed with 95 percent of the principals, teachers, parents and students who currently exist in our inner-city public schools.

The writer is a Cleveland teacher.

Washington Post, 10/12/1996

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about NSBA...

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. NSBA achieves its mission by amplifying the influence of school boards across the country in all public forums relevant to federal and national education issues, by representing the school board perspective before federal government agencies and with national organizations that affect education, and by providing vital information and services to Federation Members and school boards throughout the nation.

NSBA advocates local school boards as the ultimate expression of the unique American institution of representative governance of public school districts. NSBA supports the capacity of each school board—acting on behalf of and in close concert with the people of its community—to envision the future of education in its community, to establish a structure and environment that allow all students to reach their maximum potential, to provide accountability for the people of its community on performance in the schools, and to serve as the key community advocate for children and youth and their public schools.

Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. NSBA represents the nation's 95,000 school board members. These board members govern 14,772 local school districts that serve more than 46.5 million public school students—approximately 90 percent of all elementary and secondary school students in the nation. Virtually all school board members are elected; the remainder are appointed by elected officials.

NSBA policy is determined by a 150-member Delegate Assembly of local school board members from throughout the nation.

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